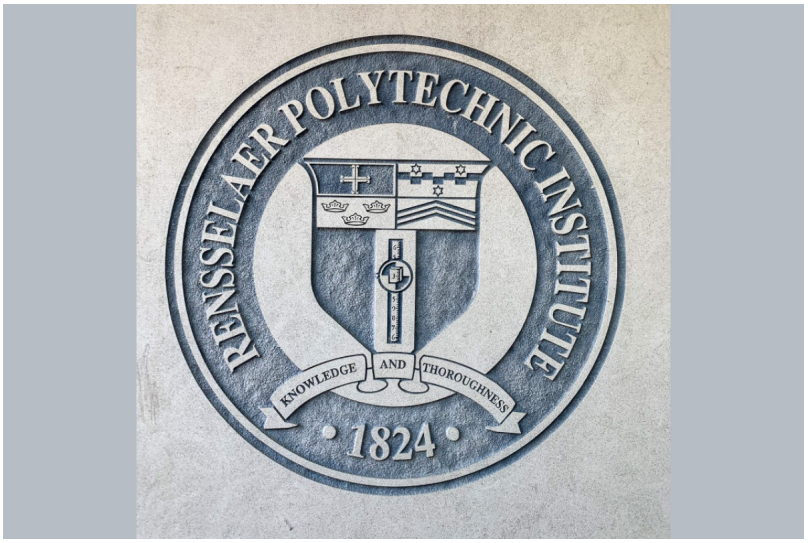
Written by **Veronika Kyrylenko** on September 12, 2025

CDC Set to Hand Autism-Vaccine Study to Single Institution

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) plans to give a sole-source contract to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) to study the link between vaccinations and autism prevalence. The announcement was published Thursday at the government contracting portal, SAM.gov.



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Why RPI? The filing states:

> The vendor has [the] unique ability to link children to maternal cohorts using proprietary databases and de-identified data sets, enabling advanced statistical analyses within the project's timeframe.

CDC also made clear it is not seeking competition:

> This contract action is for services for which the Government intends to solicit and negotiate with only one source under the authority of FAR 6.302-1.

Technically, other bidders may submit proposals, but the agency warned that any decision to open the process "is solely within the discretion of the government."

The language leaves little doubt. RPI is the chosen partner — and in a field as contentious as vaccines and autism, it is unusual to entrust the work to a single institution.

Who Is RPI?

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute bills itself as "the nation's oldest and one of the world's most renowned technological research universities." Founded in 1824 in Troy, New York, it built its reputation on engineering and data science. In recent years, it has moved heavily into biotech.

Its Center for Biotechnology and Interdisciplinary Studies (CBIS) is the flagship. The $100-million facility operates as a biotech hub within a tech-focused university, where researchers work on drug discovery, regenerative medicine, and advanced biomanufacturing. With this capacity, RPI has long drawn federal grants and corporate partnerships, building the infrastructure needed to carry out the kind of large-scale, data-driven studies now sought by the CDC.

Another key initiative is the Center for Sustainable Biomanufacturing (CSB). It is a newer but strategic effort to make biologics — including monoclonal antibodies, mRNA therapies, and vaccines — cheaper and more efficient to produce. By cutting raw material use, reducing waste, improving energy efficiency, and advancing continuous manufacturing, CSB aims to replace traditional batch production.

By stressing cost efficiency and sustainability, CSB plugs directly into federal priorities on modernizing the bio-industrial base and strengthening health-security supply chains. This positioning helps explain why RPI has become such a trusted partner for both government and industry on high-stakes projects.

RPI's Ties to Vaccine Makers

RPI is also no stranger to vaccine science. This year, it struck a research deal with BioNTech, the German firm behind the Pfizer Covid shot, to improve mRNA vaccine manufacturing.

Its scientists also help lead a joint effort with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to design "continuous manufacturing" for mRNA drugs. That would let companies churn out vaccines and therapies faster and cheaper. The project was financed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2023.

Even the board of trustees shows ties. Jackson Tai, an RPI trustee, serves on the board of WuXi Biologics, a global contract development and manufacturing company that works with vaccine makers around the world. He also previously served as a director at Eli Lilly, one of the largest pharmaceutical firms and a major vaccine producer. John Capek, another trustee, is a former executive at Abbott Laboratories and Eli Lilly — both serious pharma players.

The Autism Question

Mainstream medicine insists there is no link between vaccines and autism. Public health agencies, medical associations, and most major media call the claim a "conspiracy theory."

Yet parents have been telling a different story for decades. They describe healthy toddlers suddenly regressing — losing speech, eye contact, or motor skills — within days of vaccination. For many families, the change feels too sudden, too dramatic, to dismiss as coincidence.

Children's Health Defense (CHD), the nonprofit founded by Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., has spent years collecting these accounts alongside scientific studies. Its files are filled with parents' testimonies of children who stopped developing normally after routine immunizations.

Evidence has also surfaced in official forums. At a recent Senate hearing, Toby Rogers of the Brownstone Institute cited a study showing that 88 percent of autism cases involve autistic regression. He argued (pdf here) that the pattern points to "acute toxic exposure." The expert noted that thousands of parents identify vaccination as the moment that preceded the regression.

The debate has become one of the most heated in modern medicine. The issue is dismissed by institutions, yet kept alive by lived experience and growing demands for transparency and accountability.

Kennedy's HHS

Secretary Kennedy built his reputation on demanding transparency about vaccine safety and criticizing corporate capture of public health agencies. Certainly, the Constitution grants the federal government no authority to regulate public health. Setting that aside, though, Kennedy's tenure at HHS has so far brought little change to the childhood immunization schedule. The only exception is the FDA's recent move to limit Covid vaccines for children to those with at least one health complication.

In June, Kennedy announced he wanted to "Make American Biotech Accelerate." In practice, that means

the FDA shifting toward expedited approvals, AI-driven automation, and industry collaboration.

Kennedy did shake things up by reshuffling the CDC and its vaccine advisory panel, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. He argued the moves were needed to "restore trust" in both the agency and the vaccines. What direction the new leadership will take remains uncertain.

The MAHA Commission's strategy report issued this week calls for "modernizing" vaccines. Figures in the medical freedom movement, such as Dr. Henry Ealy, have interpreted the developments as preparations to phasing out older shots in favor of genetic platforms like mRNA.

In August, HHS canceled $500 million in mRNA grants. The move was widely seen as a retreat from a platform blamed for Covid's disastrous outcomes. Yet the technology — and Covid boosters — remains firmly in play. The Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) is investing heavily in Biden-era Project NextGen. It develops new Covid vaccines and related genetic therapies. Other studies within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are also underway.

A pro-biotech shift is also visible in personnel. Jim O'Neill, a longtime biotech investor and Peter Thiel associate, now serves as deputy secretary of HHS and acting head of the CDC. His record strongly points toward a more aggressive embrace of genetic platforms.

"Modernized Vaccines"

Against this backdrop, the decision to give one institute the CDC autism-vaccine study looks less like an anomaly and more like part of a larger trajectory. Kennedy may be slowing some initiatives, but the U.S. is clearly positioning itself to move away from "traditional" vaccines — long shown to be harmful — toward so-called "modernized" ones. If that is the case, the question is whether these new platforms will deliver real safety improvements, or whether they will carry the same risks — and new ones of their own.

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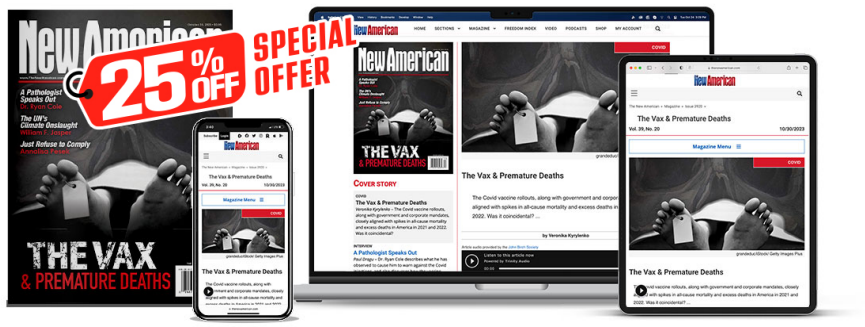

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