

## How to Fight RFK Jr.'s Ambiguous Vaccine Agenda: Insights from Dr. Abdul El-Sayed

**Dr. Abdul El-Sayed**  
*Host, America Dissected podcast*  
*Physician, epidemiologist, author, educator*



### ***This time on Code WACK!***

Can our local health departments counteract the mixed messages given by RFK, Jr. the secretary of Health and Human Services, about vaccine safety and efficacy? What about us? ***How can we combat disinformation and highlight the benefits of vaccinating our children and ourselves?***

To find out, we spoke with **Dr. Abdul El-Sayed**—physician, epidemiologist, author, and county health commissioner. He is formerly the health director for the city of Detroit. As the host of the award-winning [America Dissected](#) podcast, he breaks down the forces shaping public health for tens of thousands of listeners each week. *This is the second of two episodes with Dr. El-Sayed.*

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# WE DISCUSS

## *What can be done if vaccine disinformation is being put out by agencies in the federal government?*

“... local communities can act on their own to try and drive pro-vaccine messaging. The hard part about it though is that, you know, the federal government is a big microphone and ... it's not great to have different agencies saying different things, right? That's just, that's just bad by definition. That increases the lack of clarity ... about the situation and amplifies the quote unquote “open questions,” despite the fact that the science has been settled on this for a very long time. The worry I have though, is that the federal government does have ways to try and compel state and local governments.

“... I think good, fair-minded, scientifically minded people will be out there promoting ... the scientifically backed thing to do to protect yourself. But, you know, the unfortunate reality of that is that there are a lot of folks who don't have the time and the space to be able to look into this. And when they hear conflicting messages, what tends to happen is people bias toward inaction. And in this case, it's biasing toward *not* taking a vaccine and that's really worrying to me, right?” –  
**Dr. Abdul El-Sayed**

## *How can we respond to the mixed messaging about vaccines and really get through to people?*

“... too often .. we try to appeal to a perceived sense of expertise that people don't really care that much about. Right? When I'm asked in the community about vaccines, what I tell folks is like, “*Look, I could tell you, you know, as a doctor and an epidemiologist, but really, let me just tell you as a dad, like the day my kids turned one years old, I took them to get vaccinated.*”

Why? Because I know what these diseases do to people, and I also know how much I love my little girls, and I want them to be alive so long as, you know, I can hold them and care for them and feed them and love them and smell them, and all the things that you want to do with your children. And I don't want a disease to take that away from me.... – **Dr. Abdul El-Sayed**

### ***What message would you give to Americans who are worried about vaccine policies under RFK Jr. as head of Health & Human Services?***

“Your voice matters. This is your democracy and your government. Speak up.

“I think we all forget that all of us have a platform. Even if your platform is the 10 people you see every day. And I think it's important for us to come to these conversations and have them, but to have them in a way that's empathic. And that starts with listening.

“And I think sometimes we focus a lot on what powerful people like RFK Jr. do, and we inadvertently rob ourselves of our own power.

“And so I want folks to remember that you too can be someone who speaks up against mis[information] and disinformation and probably you're more powerful, right? ... if you are somebody in your daily life who's like, 'I'm really concerned about the situation and I'm going to make sure that people around me understand what I believe, and if they're hesitant about these things, I'm going to have an empathic conversation that starts with listening to their fears and gets them to a place where they understand that I care a lot about what they're afraid of, but also care about them and I believe in this thing,' I think all of us can do a lot of good.

So I hope that folks will step into their own power and their own platform in a moment like this to embrace what we can all do to combat mis[information] and disinformation..” – **Dr. Abdul El-Sayed**

# Helpful Links

[America Dissected](#), *Crooked Media*

[How Local Health Departments Protect Families from Vaccine-Preventable Diseases](#), *National Association of County and City Health Officials*

[Americans' Largely Positive Views of Childhood Vaccines Hold Steady](#),  
**Pew Research Center**

[How to talk to your friends and family about vaccines](#), *UNICEF*

# Episode Transcript

Read the [episode transcript](#)

## Guest Biography - Dr. Abdul El-Sayed

**Dr. Abdul El-Sayed** is a physician, epidemiologist, educator, and county health commissioner. Abdul hosts the award-winning "**America Dissected**" podcast, attracting tens of thousands of weekly listeners to go beyond the headlines to explore the intersection between health and society.

His three books include "**Healing Politics**," calling for a politics of empathy to cure our epidemic of insecurity, and "**Medicare for All: A Citizen's Guide**" with Dr. Micah Johnson.

His over 100 peer-reviewed publications have earned nearly 3,700 citations. He holds academic appointments at the intersection between public health, public

policy, and politics at the University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, the FXB Center for Health & Human Rights at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Wayne State University, and American University.

He is formerly the health director for the city of Detroit, candidate for governor of Michigan in 2018, and commentator at CNN. He's a proud member of the National Writers Union, AFT Locals 477 and 6244, SEIU Local 500, and the AAUP.

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