



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on August 2, 2022

Would Empowering CDC Help Improve Disease Outbreak Response?

The sloppy response to the ongoing monkeypox outbreak demonstrates that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requires “proper reform” that would transform it into a “crisis organization,” according to some. With appropriate funding that would straighten out the CDC’s “authority” and “national-security mindset,” the agency could adequately respond to the infectious disease outbreaks that could become more deadly, warned former U.S. Food and Drug (FDA) commissioner and current Pfizer board member Dr. Scott Gottlieb.



AP Images

In an [opinion piece](#) published in *The New York Times* on Saturday, Gottlieb took no prisoners when speaking about the CDC’s response to the monkeypox outbreak. He wrote,

Our country’s response to monkeypox has been plagued by the same shortcomings we had with Covid-19. Now if monkeypox gains a permanent foothold in the United States and becomes an endemic virus that joins our circulating repertoire of pathogens, it will be one of the worst public health failures in modern times not only because of the pain and peril of the disease but also because it was so avoidable.

Gottlieb lamented that the CDC failed to expand testing for monkeypox on time, when the first cases of the disease were reported in Europe. Moreover, when it came to the country, the agency “had been testing all people who presented with what was presumed to be atypical cases of diseases like genital herpes and zoster infection,” noted the former commissioner, citing CDC data showing that from mid-May to the end of June, the agency tested only about 2,000 samples, when it should have been 15,000, per Gottlieb’s estimates.

The first case of monkeypox in the United States was confirmed on May 18. As of August 1, there have been a total of [5,811 confirmed cases](#) in the country.

Then, the government, apparently, did not keep nearly enough of the only vaccine preventing and treating pox diseases, Jynneos. “The United States had on hand [fewer than 2,400 doses in mid-May](#), mostly as a hedge against the risk of smallpox, which was the vaccine’s other indication,” noted Gottlieb.

That may be, yet the Pfizer board member did not mention that the Biden administration was actually preparing for the outbreak. As [reported](#) by *The New American*, the U.S. Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) — a daughter agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and a part of its Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response — ordered 13 million doses of the monkeypox Jynneos vaccine on *the same day* the first



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American case was confirmed, according to a [press release](#) published by vaccine manufacturer Bavarian Nordic.

“The C.D.C. should lead America’s response to viral exigencies. But the agency isn’t a crisis organization,” Gottlieb said, pointing to the agency’s “cultural instinct” to “debate each decision” when it needs to “move quickly.” Another shortcoming slowing down the CDC down was identified as the lack of infrastructure to “mobilize a rapid response” to the outbreaks.

Gottlieb then went straight to the point. “Proper reform would require empowering public health agencies with new tools, funding and authority,” he stated.

That means that U.S. taxpayers will have to cover the cost of the CDC acquiring more sophisticated tools to address the spread of viral diseases.

Worse yet, “empowering” the agency with “authority” would most likely mean increased weight of its public health advice. As we’ve seen from the role the CDC played in the Covid pandemic response, when its “recommendations” were adopted by many governors and local public-health authorities, the increase of the CDC’s powers would only lead to the escalation of what conservative observers rightfully call “medical tyranny.”

Gottlieb, however, believes that it would be necessary to address the spread of “dangerous pathogens” that are “on the march.”

He concluded his article with an ominous warning:

Time is running out. Diseases like Zika, Covid and monkeypox are a dire warning that dangerous pathogens are on the march. The next one could be worse — a deadly strain of flu or something more sinister like Marburg virus. We’ve now had ample notice that the nation continues to be unprepared and that our vulnerabilities are enormous.

The only authority that could “empower” the CDC is the Biden administration, noted Gottlieb, citing “the scant appetite for such a move” in the U.S. Congress on both sides of the aisle.

The CDC, facing a growing credibility crisis over its Covid pandemic response, [announced its “revamping”](#) earlier this year.

The effort was set to launch on April 11. The preliminary results have yet to be reported.

Yet the core issue of the CDC’s troubles and its inability to produce sound healthcare advice appears to be much more complex than a lack of funding and authority.

As noted by a *New York Times* [report](#) in February, the agency is heavily influenced by politics. Per the report,

The CDC also has multiple bureaucratic divisions that must sign off on important publications, and its officials must alert the Department of Health and Human Services — which oversees the agency — and the White House of their plans.

This presumably means that the HHS, as the CDC’s parent entity, and the White House, as the parent entity of the HHS, may, in fact, instruct the CDC on its data release.

Samuel Scarpino, managing director of pathogen surveillance at the Rockefeller Foundation’s Pandemic



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Prevention Institute, who spoke with the outlet, put it simply. “The CDC is a *political organization* as much as it is a public health organization,” he said. (Emphasis added.) “The steps that it takes to get something like this released are often well outside of the control of many of the scientists that work at the C.D.C.”



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