



August 28, 2026

Welcome to *Washington Update*, the weekly newsletter on the latest health care happenings in the nation's capital that affect APG's members.

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As National Outbreak Grows, "Measles-Associated" Deaths in Pennsylvania Spark Bitter Political Sniping

The deaths of two unvaccinated Pennsylvania residents that the [state labeled](#) "measles-associated" set off a firestorm this week, raising new concerns about vaccine avoidance, but also devolving quickly into a pre-election brickbat-throwing contest between the state's governor and Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Pennsylvania health officials said the deaths of the two individuals – one of whom was an infant, and both of whom were residents of Lancaster County, whose concentration of Amish people include many who are unvaccinated – constituted the state's first measles deaths in 35 years. The state declined to release other information about the deaths, including the identities of those who died, citing

the need to respect privacy. Kennedy then [wrote](#) on the social media platform X that the state's announcement "appears to have been premature, and the deaths may even have been altogether fabricated by one of the [Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's] hopeful staffers." Other hostilities ensued; Shapiro [lambasted](#) Kennedy's multiple anti-vaccine words and actions as "contributing to these kinds of outbreaks" and rejected the health secretary's offer to send HHS staff to Pennsylvania to help.

Uncertainties? A swirl of confusion has followed, including over the state's insistence that privacy limits its ability to provide further details, and on what role the presence of measles antibodies in the blood played in the infant's death. A local coroner [told](#) news reporters that the death was not due to measles, but rather to an internal hemorrhage and "traumatic rupture" of the spleen, a verdict that some experts have questioned. What is clear is that measles cases in the United States are now at their highest level since 1991, while recently released [CDC data](#) shows an ongoing decline in measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccination rates among kindergartners. As previously reported, a recent White House executive [order](#) called for breaking up the MMR vaccine into separate doses ([Washington Update](#), August 14), a measure that many experts believe would only cause take-up of the vaccine to fall further.

In other vaccine-related news:

- Oral arguments have been scheduled for [Sept. 3](#) and [October 6](#) in two separate federal court cases brought against Kennedy and other Trump administration officials for reconstituting the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and subsequent actions regarding childhood immunizations.
- HHS issued a [request for information](#) seeking feedback on the category of "shared clinical decision-making" when applied to vaccine recommendations and how the definition could be revised, clarified further, or expanded.
- A federal Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee adopted a strategic [plan](#) recommending that HHS spend more money on research investigating whether vaccines and environmental toxins are linked to an increase in autism diagnoses.
- A pediatric neurologist, John Gaitanis, MD, PhD, who has served as a paid expert witness for families alleging their children were injured by vaccines, was [appointed](#) head of the National Institutes of Health's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. [News reports](#) cited his affiliation with autism organizations that promote alternative treatments for the neurodevelopmental condition.



Congress' Short Legislative Calendar Likely To Limit Many Actions Beyond Short-Term Funding Extension

With the House returning from recess on Monday, August 31, Capitol Hill watchers are handicapping coming actions by both chambers given the limited legislative calendar that remains before midterm elections, as follows:

- The House passed its own continuing [resolution](#) (CR) extending fiscal 2026 spending until December before it recessed in late July, but it is now expected to change course and adopt the [version](#) that the Senate approved before it left Washington on August 8. The Senate version, which would extend funding until December 11, delays implementation of a proposed new Federal [rule](#) that would give more authority to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) over federal grant awards. Otherwise, the CR is mostly “clean,” in that it doesn’t contain extraneous provisions, such as health care cuts.
- The Senate is not scheduled to return until Monday, September 14, but once it’s back, it is likely to confront sharp disagreements over whether to enact another reconciliation package with major spending increases in areas such as defense and agriculture. The House adopted a [blueprint](#) for a package in mid-July, with no health care provisions but with large spending increases to fund the Iran war and distribute farm aid, along with a watered-down version of SAVE America election integrity legislation. Senate Budget Committee Chair Ron Johnson (R-WI) released his own [blueprint](#) for a reconciliation bill in August, and with the nation barreling toward the \$41.1 trillion limit on the federal debt, the Trump administration is urging Republican leaders to use the package to [extend](#) the debt limit through 2029.

Given the approaching midterms — and growing signs that Republicans could lose control of both the House and the Senate — there appears to be little enthusiasm within the GOP Senate leadership for having to defend either measure once lawmakers return to the campaign trail in early October. APC will continue to monitor the action and advance its legislative priorities, which seem increasingly likely to be delayed at least until after the elections.



In Case You Missed It

- Amid signs of growing costs from Medicare's provision of GLP-1 drugs under the so-called [Bridge](#) program, **multiple states are [rejecting](#) the Trump administration's offer to expand access to the drugs for Medicaid patients.** The states — aware that they will have to match any new federal funds with their own dollars — are concerned about the budgetary impact and long-term financial sustainability of Trump's model, which would require them to join the administration in negotiating prices directly with the drugs' manufacturers.
- With health care costs a top midterm election issue, **the Trump administration is expected to unveil new Most-Favored-Nation [deals](#)** with biotech companies to cut drug prices for state Medicaid programs.
- **Providers won about 85 percent of Independent Dispute Resolution (IDR) claims under the No Surprises Act in 2025**, causing costs to balloon to \$22 billion over four years, Georgetown University researchers report in a [study](#) published in *Health Affairs Forefront*.
- In the wake of Heidi Overton's nomination as the next Food and Drug Administration commissioner ([Washington Update](#), August 21), **Republicans on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions committee released a [report](#) accusing mifepristone manufacturers of negligence** in failing to adequately oversee distribution of the abortion drug by third-party resellers. Overton has [opposed](#) use of the FDA-approved pill, describing it as dangerous to women.
- **Employers' health care costs are set to climb an estimated 9.5 percent in 2027**, rising for the fourth straight year at or near a double-digit pace, according to an Aon [report](#). As elsewhere, rising medical utilization, chronic disease prevalence, and growth in drug spending are driving the trend.



APG Announcements And Offerings

- [Registration is now open](#) for the **APG Fall Conference 2026 - From Policy To Practice: What's Next For Accountable Care?** to be held November 18-20 at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland

near Washington, DC. Please register now for Super Early Bird savings.

- [Sponsorship registration](#) is also now open for the Fall Conference. Please visit our Fall Conference 2026 sponsor website for more information about sponsorships and exhibitor opportunities.
- Join the APG hosted webinar titled **“Intercepting Chronic Disease: Utilizing Preventive Diagnostics to Improve Patient Population Health,”** on **Tuesday, September 22, 3:00pm ET** presented by Quest Diagnostics. The webinar is open to the public. Register [here](#).
- Learn more about **APG’s Group Purchasing Program**, where a variety of companies are offering special pricing to APG members during a webinar on **Thursday, September 24, 2:00 pm ET**. Register [here](#).
- The APG hosted webinar titled **“Implementing evidence-based guidelines for Cardio-Renal-Metabolic patient populations,”** presented by Boehringer Ingelheim, will take place **Tuesday, November 10, 2:00 pm ET**. The webinar is open to the public. Register [here](#).
- **Want to get more involved in APG’s Federal advocacy efforts?** [Join APG Advocates today.](#)