



David Kessler

Co-Chair of President Biden's COVID-19 Advisory Board; Chief Coronavirus Scientific Officer



Life In Brief

Born: May 13, 1951

Birthplace: New York City, NY

Ethnicity: White/Caucasian

Marital Status: Married

Education Summary:

MD, Harvard University, 1979

JD, University of Chicago, 1977

BA, Amherst College, 1973

Family:

- Two children

Work History:

- Chief Coronavirus Scientific Officer, Department of Health and Human Services, 2021-Present
- Co-chair, Joe Biden's COVID-19 Advisory Board, 2020-Present
- Professor, University of California - San Francisco School of Medicine
- Dean and Vice-Chancellor, University of California - San Francisco School of Medicine, 2003-2007
- Dean, Yale University School of Medicine, 1997-2003
- Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration, 1990-1997
- Professor, Columbia University School of Law, 1986-1990
- Medical Director, Hospital of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, 1984-1990

- Special Assistant to the President, Montefiore Medical Center, 1982-1984
- Consultant, US Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, 1981-1984

Quick Summary

An accomplished medical and legal expert known for his improvements to the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) efficiency and regulatory power, Dr. Kessler is a prominent public health researcher on issues such as obesity and tobacco use; most recently, Kessler has transitioned to serve as a senior scientific officer on Biden's coronavirus response team

- After graduating from Amherst College, Kessler received his law degree while also earning his medical degree; while completing his residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital, he also served as a consultant to Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) on food and drug policy
- Was appointed as FDA Commissioner in 1990 by President George H.W. Bush where he worked alongside Dr. Anthony Fauci to increase efficiency by hiring 600 new examiners to expedite drug approvals and rejections, including drug treatments for HIV/AIDS
- His FDA leadership also included notable consumer protection regulatory efforts, such as the standardization of Nutrition Facts labels on foods, a moratorium on silicone breast implants and subsequent consumer settlements, and the attempted regulation of cigarettes that laid the groundwork for the federal control of the tobacco industry seen today
- After the FDA, Kessler served as dean of Yale School of Medicine and later as dean of the University of California - San Francisco School of Medicine, where he resigned after raising questions about the university's financial improprieties



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Vignette
by National Journal

- Published author who has written books such as *A Question of Intent* about his time at the FDA, *The End of Overeating and Fast Carbs, Slow Carbs*, which discuss the relationship between food and obesity, and *Capture*, which looks at the origins behind mental illnesses
- Served as co-chair of President-elect Joe Biden's COVID-19 Advisory Board, along with former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy and Yale University's public health professor Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith; Kessler and Murthy began advising Biden's campaign in March 2020
- In January 2021, Kessler was selected by Biden to serve as the chief coronavirus scientific officer to manage and coordinate the rollout and distribution of coronavirus vaccines, where he is expected to encourage converting gyms and convention centers into vaccination sites; transition team sources predict Kessler will lead an antiviral development program and work to approve and expedite new vaccines
- incorrectly labeled as "fresh" rather than from concentrate
- Research on obesity and food science is motivated by his significant weight fluctuations and a lifelong question of why he was unable to resist certain foods; draws on his knowledge of how the tobacco industry makes its products addictive to highlight how food companies engage in similar manipulative behaviors
- Disapproves of politicizing public health, including throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, saying that decisions considered political will "set back people's health because it will undermine their confidence"; seeks to establish political coordination between various levels of government and private sector companies on COVID-19 to improve the federal response, testing, and vaccine efforts

Approach and Motivations

As FDA commissioner, Kessler encouraged strict enforcement and adherence to the law to assert authority and implement effective oversight; outspoken and pragmatic researcher who draws on his own past health struggles, and rejects the politicization of public health

- When he was first appointed to the FDA, Kessler aimed to restore the agency's credibility after a 1990 advisory committee report described an overwhelmed and demoralized staff that struggled with increased duties and an insufficient budget
- Believes in thorough enforcement of FDA regulations and unafraid to implement change; hired over 100 investigators to identify violations of drug and food laws and directed the federal seizure of 2,000 cases of orange juice for being

Professional Affiliations

- Board of Directors, Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2010-Present