CDC Director Rochelle Walensky Announces Departure

Rochelle Walensky restored morale at the health agency and launched the widest-reaching reforms in decades to strengthen CDC operations.

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky announced today, May 5, her intent to depart the agency at the end of June. Walensky has led CDC through a transition to greater normalcy across the country, after two years of COVID-19 related closures and waves of dangerous, new virus variants. She also launched Moving Forward — a wide-ranging set of reforms designed to strengthen CDC communications and response operations. Walensky described this moment for the agency and the country in a letter to President Joe Biden.

“The end of the COVID-19 public health emergency marks a tremendous transition for our country, for public health, and in my tenure as CDC Director,” Walensky wrote. “I took on this role, at your request, with the goal of leaving behind the dark days of the pandemic and moving CDC — and public health — forward into a much better and more trusted place.

“In the process, we saved and improved lives and protected the country and the world from the greatest infectious disease threat we have seen in over 100 years.”

Importantly, Walensky helped restore morale and a sense of normalcy to an agency that had been enduring significant public adversity related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Dr. Walensky has saved lives with her steadfast and unwavering focus on the health of every American,” President Joe Biden said. “As director of the CDC, she led a complex organization on the front lines of a once-in-a-generation pandemic with honesty and integrity. Dr. Walensky leaves CDC a stronger institution, better positioned to confront health threats and protect Americans. We have all benefited from her service and dedication to public health, and I wish her the best in the next chapter.”

On her watch, CDC successfully addressed a multinational mpox outbreak, contained the spread of Ebola in Uganda, and responded to countless infectious disease threats in countries around the globe.

The agency also invested in America’s public health infrastructure and established pipelines to

grow the public health workforce. CDC launched a center for forecasting and outbreaks and secured hundreds of millions of dollars to begin modernizing our nation's data infrastructure.

The reforms of Moving Forward are designed to orient CDC toward public health action, foster accountability and improve the timeliness and clarity of scientific communications. Changes are under way on everything from expanding the number of staff who are ready to respond to a disease outbreak to the implementation of plain language trainings to the overhaul of CDC's website, so that it's easier for people to find the public health information they need. Additionally, a successful reorganization expanded and strengthened the leadership team within CDC's Immediate Office of the Director and eliminated bureaucracy.

"While at CDC, I had the true gift of meeting, working with, and giving voice to thousands of people at the agency who work 24/7 to worry about health and public health so that the rest of the nation does not have to," Walensky said. "I have never been prouder of anything I have done in my professional career."

Prior to joining CDC, Walensky served as Chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital from 2017–2020 and Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School from 2012–2020. She served on the front line of the COVID-19 pandemic and conducted research on vaccine delivery and strategies to reach underserved communities.

Walensky is recognized internationally for her work to improve HIV screening and care in South Africa and nationally for motivating health policy and informing clinical trial design and evaluation in a variety of settings.

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