

Laura Davis Productions inc.

A black rectangular title card with the word "VIRULENT" in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below it, the words "THE VACCINE WAR" are written in a smaller, white, sans-serif capital font.

VIRULENT

THE VACCINE WAR

LOGLINE

VIRULENT: The Vaccine War examines the consequences of vaccine hesitancy and denial. It's a war anti-vax activists have been fighting for more than a decade. And COVID-19 is the thing they practiced for: A national conversation about vaccine safety & mandates.

SYNOPSIS

Virulent: The Vaccine War explores the highly contentious, emotionally fraught firestorm surrounding vaccines, charting the collision between scientists and charlatans, truth and lies.

The filmmakers were on the homestretch of a documentary about vaccine hesitancy, which the World Health Organization had called one of the top ten threats to global health, when COVID-19 struck. The pandemic upended the world and spun the film into uncharted territory. The vaccine controversy cuts across political, cultural, racial and socio-economic lines, engulfing doctors, patients, ethicists and those who report the news as well as conspiracy theorists, opportunists looking to cash in and celebrities.

This is a journey of discovery featuring a diverse cast of characters. We put a human face on scientists and doctors in the trenches including **Dr. Paul Offit**, one of the world's preeminent virologists and the project's medical advisor; **Dr. Lorna McFarland**, an African American pediatrician who was on the frontline in West Africa; **Dr. Peter Salk**, polio inventor Dr. Jonas Salk's physician son, as well as others like **Arthur Caplan, PhD**, who founded NYU's Division of Bioethics; New York Times columnist **Kevin Roose**, who writes about how disinformation spreads online; NBC News reporter **Brandy Zadrozny**, who has exposed how anti-vaxxers target grieving parents and has herself become a target; high school senior **Ethan**

Lindenberger, who made headlines when he had himself vaccinated against his parents' wishes; and former vaccine skeptics including those who lost children to vaccine-preventable illnesses.

The film shines a harsh spotlight on leaders of the anti-vaccine movement including Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who disseminates junk science to African Americans who still hold his father in high esteem and have every reason to distrust government and the medical establishment. Others, like Larry Cook, peddle the modern-day equivalent of snake oil, while those like Del Bigtree shamelessly and successfully solicit millions in donations. Social media is expertly manipulated, always pushing toward the extremes, knocking facts aside and never flinching at the terrible cost in suffering these posts inflict.

Virulent: The Vaccine War is an invitation to think again, exposing the myths and laying bare the facts about vaccine science, its history and what it will take to eradicate the world's most deadly diseases.

THE FILMMAKERS' RELATIONSHIP TO THE FILM'S SUBJECT

Writer-director Tjardus Greidanus and producer Laura Davis first got interested in vaccines after being asked by the Pittsburgh non-profit Steeltown Entertainment to make *A Shot to Save the World* (Smithsonian/BBC), a film about the six years Dr. Jonas Salk spent developing the polio vaccine in Davis's hometown. Through interviews with all of the then-surviving members of Salk's lab and others connected to his story, they met one of the world's leading virologists, Dr. Paul Offit, head of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia; a vaccine advisor to the Biden administration; and the new film's project medical advisor. They also got to know Jonas Salk's family – his son, public health expert Dr. Peter Salk, appears in the film – and Arthur Caplan, PhD, the dean of American medical ethicists who has written extensively about vaccines. Finally, to better understand the cause of vaccine hesitancy and denial, they conducted over a dozen in-depth interviews with vaccine-hesitant parents who candidly shared the experiences that inspired their fear and skepticism. Some of those interviews appear in the film.