

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 29, 2020

Robert R. Redfield, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Redfield,

We write to express significant concern regarding the recent decline in routine childhood immunization rates in the United States during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and urge you to take immediate action to encourage and support routine pediatric immunizations through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to recent data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a decline in provider orders for non-influenza childhood vaccines, and measles-containing vaccines including the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, began one week after President Trump declared a national emergency on March 13, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ In May, the Michigan Care Improvement Registry found a drastic decrease in vaccination rates among children across nearly every age group. The percentage of children five months and younger who remain up-to-date on recommended vaccines declined from 67.9 percent in 2019, to 49.7 percent in May 2020.² The New York City health department reported a 63 percent drop in the number of vaccine doses administered to children between March 23 and May 9, including a 91 percent drop for children ages 2 and above.³

The administration of routine pediatric immunizations remains critical throughout the duration of this public health emergency. The decline in immunizations is largely attributable to efforts by families to adhere to social distancing guidelines to reduce both their exposure to, and the spread of COVID-19. But if this trend of decreased immunization rates among children continues, the United States could face yet another public health crisis: increased risk of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. Such outbreaks would put lives at risk, and place additional stress on our health care system and public health infrastructure at a time when these systems are struggling to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. *Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Routine Pediatric Vaccine Ordering and Administration, United States 2020*. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/pdfs/mm6919e2-H.pdf>

² Id.

³ *New York Times*. Child Vaccinations Plummet 63 Percent, a New Hurdle for N.Y.C. Schools. May 20, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/nyregion/coronavirus-schools-vaccinations.html>

To avoid this potential crisis, we urge the CDC to immediately develop an action plan that incorporates targeted public outreach and education efforts on addressing vaccine hesitancy and emphasizing the importance of pediatric immunizations; resources for communities that have seen reductions in their immunization rates since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; and guidance for parents and families on how to safely access pediatric immunizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, including best practices regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) use and other precautions to limit the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in health care settings; and necessary efforts to ensure rapid catch-up for children who are not up to date on critical pediatric vaccines.

In addition to developing the plans described above, we request that you respond to the following questions no later than July 1, 2020 to help us better understand how the federal government is working to address the alarming drop in pediatric immunization rates:

1. What specific steps is CDC taking to reverse the dramatic drop in vaccinations since mid-March?
 - a. How does CDC plan to capture accurate real-time data on pediatric immunization rates and identify potential solutions, particularly in vulnerable communities?
2. What outreach and education efforts are underway at CDC to address fears among parents and families related to bringing children into health care settings during the COVID-19 crisis?
 - a. Is CDC planning a public information campaign to address vaccine hesitancy, and if so, how will CDC ensure that the necessary communication on the importance of routine immunizations is reaching parents and families?
 - b. How will CDC ensure that families receive guidance on safe access to care for children during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the appropriate use of PPE?
 - c. How will CDC communicate with health care workers, and provide the necessary tools to inform communities about the importance of receiving pediatric immunizations during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - d. What guidance is CDC providing to pediatricians and other health care workers on procedures to ensure that they can safely provide and promote routine pediatric immunizations?
 - e. Given the significant increase in unemployment due to COVID-19, many families are finding themselves uninsured. How will CDC raise awareness of the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program to ensure that families know their children can still access routine immunizations, and how does CDC plan to support participating VFC providers as they work to catch up VFC-eligible children on missed vaccinations, while also preparing for the upcoming flu season?

3. How will CDC monitor the ongoing availability and ordering of pediatric immunizations, including doses and other essential medical devices, PPE, and other supplies needed to store, transport and administer vaccines, and what plans are in place to address any supply chain disruptions?
 - a. Is CDC taking steps now to ensure that the availability of pediatric immunizations, and necessary medical devices and supplies, is not impacted when production and domestic distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine is underway?
4. Has CDC developed or reviewed modeling or projections that predict the potential impact on future vaccine-preventable outbreaks if the current pediatric immunization rate continues throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. Does CDC require additional resources from Congress in order to support efforts to reverse the decline in pediatric immunizations? If so, what level of funding would be sufficient?

We appreciate your timely response and look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/ Patty Murray

Patty Murray
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith

Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Doug Jones

Doug Jones
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator