

December 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to bring to your attention an urgent situation that needs immediate Congressional action to help correct: a sustained decrease in immunization rates for recommended vaccines across all ages.

One of the unfortunate side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is a dramatic fall in immunization rates among children and adults. Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, the drop in childhood immunization rates was noted in the May 8 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR), which reported that data obtained from the Vaccine Tracking System showed a significant decrease in orders for Vaccines for Children (VFC)-funded, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended non-influenza childhood vaccines and for measles-containing vaccines from January 6 through April 19, 2020, when compared to the same time period in 2019. A similar report in the May 18 MMWR noticed a steep decline in vaccination coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic in data supplied from the Michigan Care Improvement Registry.

An analysis from VaxCare in June also found that non-influenza vaccine rates among individuals of all ages dropped dramatically during COVID-19. This data showed that vaccination rates for adults age 65 years and older dropped an alarming 83 percent compared to last year, and in individuals age 19 to 49 years, there were declines of more than 60 percent.

Furthermore, in late May, a report on the *Impact of COVID-19 on Local Health Department Immunization Programs* assessment found that nearly 90 percent of respondents indicated that immunization programs and services were impacted by the COVID-19 response. The most frequently reported immunization activities included the provision of clinical services (83 percent), and most respondents (88 percent) indicated that program staff were re-assigned due to the local health department's need to respond to COVID-19. Notably, 17 percent indicated the need to re-direct funding from immunization program budgets to the COVID-19 response

While data shows that vaccination rates increased over the summer from their previous lows in the spring, they still have not rebounded to the previous year's level. In addition, as children returned to school in the fall, immunization rates have again fallen. New data just released from Blue Cross and Blue Shield show that there has been an estimated 26 percent decrease of those receiving the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) and the Diphtheria, Tetanus and Acellular Pertussis (DTaP) vaccines, while the Polio vaccine has dropped 16 percent. As children return to school this winter, we must be vigilant in maintaining vaccination rates.

Unfortunately, this decline in immunizations threatens herd immunity levels, which provide protection in a community to those who cannot be vaccinated themselves and raises the possibility of a secondary outbreak of infectious disease during the pandemic. To ensure that children, adolescents and adults are still receiving routine immunizations, there needs to be continued and strengthened investment in the existing immunization delivery system and sustained messaging on the importance of receiving their recommended vaccines, particularly for children attending school. This is also important in addressing declining immunization rates in Black communities and other communities of color. As such, the undersigned organizations urge Congress to include the *Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act* (S. 4737/H.R. 8061) in the next COVID-19 legislative package to develop, scale, and evaluate local initiatives to promote recommended vaccinations during this pandemic.

The *Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act* provides much needed funding to state and local public health departments to promote ACIP-recommended vaccinations during the COVID-19 public health emergency. It would do so by strengthening partnerships with local stakeholders such as health care providers and schools, disseminating information through online platforms including social media, and conducting outreach to promote health insurance options and immunization programs like Vaccines for Children, among other efforts. It would also fund the development and dissemination of vaccine counseling guidance for community immunization providers to be able to effectively communicate with patients about a COVID-19 vaccine once one has been approved.

In addition, to counter any role that vaccine hesitancy may be playing in families not staying up to date with the recommended vaccine schedule, we also encourage Congress to include the *VACCINES Act* (H.R. 2862) in the next COVID-19 legislative package. The *VACCINES Act* was needed prior to the current coronavirus outbreak—and the current pandemic makes this bill especially crucial now. This legislation seeks to support research to better understand vaccine hesitancy, spread public awareness of the importance of vaccinations through a national public awareness campaign, and increase vaccination rates across the lifespan. Due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, this legislation is needed now more than ever to help ensure fewer Americans are receptive to misinformation about the virus and any potential vaccine.

While it is understandable that Congress is focused on the promise of a COVID-19 vaccine, we cannot ignore the potential consequences of secondary outbreak of infectious disease during the pandemic. As such, we urge Congress to take immediate action to provide much needed funding to state and local public health departments to promote ACIP-recommended vaccinations during the COVID-19

public health emergency and to combat vaccine hesitancy that lowers the immunization rate for both routine vaccines and COVID-19 vaccines.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Academic Pediatric Association
AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
American Association of Public Health Dentistry
American Association on Health and Disability
American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Institute of Dental Public Health
American Lung Association
American Pediatric Society
American Public Health Association
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
Association of Immunization Managers
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO)
Bridge the Gap – SYNGAP Education and Research Foundation
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Child Welfare League of America
Childhood Arthritis and Rheumatology Research Alliance
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Hospital Association
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Pediatric Subspecialties
Families Fighting Flu
Global Healthy Living Foundation
Hep B United
Hepatitis B Foundation
Immunization Action Coalition
International Foundation for Autoimmune & Autoinflammatory Arthritis (AiArthritis)
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Nurses
National Birth Defects Prevention Network
National Coalition for Infant Health
National Consumers League
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
National Meningitis Association
Nemours Children's Health System
Organization of Teratology Information Specialists
Pediatric Endocrine Society
Pediatric Policy Council
Pediatric Pulmonology Training Directors Association
School-Based Health Alliance
Society for Pediatric Research
Society of Critical Care Medicine
The Andrew McDonough B+ Foundation
The Mended Hearts, Inc.
Trust for America's Health
Unity Consortium
Vaccinate Your Family

State and Local Organizations

Alliance for Immunization in Michigan
Arizona Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Arizona Partnership for Immunization
California Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics
California Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics
Center for Developing Minds (California)
Children's Defense Fund (Texas)
Children's Specialty Care Coalition (California)
Children's Wisconsin
Common Good Iowa
Delaware Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Family Voices New Jersey
Florida Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Hawaii Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Hep Free Hawaii
Idaho Immunization Coalition
Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Immunize Nevada
Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Kentucky Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Langlade County Immunization Coalition (Wisconsin)
Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Massachusetts Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
Michigan Academy of Family Physicians
Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health
Michigan Osteopathic Association
Minnesota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Mississippi Center for Justice
Missouri Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Nebraska Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Nevada Academy of Family Physicians
Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Nevada Public Health Association
New York State Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics
New York State Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics
New York University Langone Long Island Hospital
New York Western Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
North Carolina Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
North Carolina Pediatric Society
Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Oregon Pediatric Society
Pennsylvania Action Coalition
Pennsylvania Delaware Valley Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
South Dakota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Southeastern Pennsylvania Black Nurses Association
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (New Jersey)
Tennessee Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
The Children's Agenda (New York)
The Emily Stillman Foundation (Michigan)
Vaccinate California
Vermont Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Washington Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Wisconsin Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics