

February 5, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart 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 Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell 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 Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to bring to your attention an urgent situation that continues to need Congressional action to help correct: a sustained decrease in immunization rates for recommended vaccines across all ages. A bill introduced this week, the *Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act (H.R. 736/S. 167)*, addresses this situation and we urge you to include it in the next COVID-19 legislative package.

One of the unfortunate side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is a dramatic fall in immunization rates among children and adults. The reduction in childhood immunization rates was noted early on in the pandemic in the May 8 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, which showed a significant decrease in orders for Vaccines for Children (VFC)-funded, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended non-influenza childhood vaccines, as well as measles-containing vaccines, from January 6 through April 19, 2020, when compared to the same time period in 2019. Additional analysis from VaxCare in June found that non-influenza vaccine rates among adults dropped dramatically as well during the COVID-19 pandemic, with rates down 83 percent for adults age 65 years and older and 60 percent for individuals age 19 to 49 years.

While vaccination rates stabilized somewhat last summer, once children returned to school in the fall, whether virtual or in-person, immunization rates again dropped off. Data released in November from Blue Cross and Blue Shield showed 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 dropped 16 percent. More recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) mirrors this trend and shows that as of January 3, overall VFC provider orders (other than flu) are down by more than 10.5 million doses compared to the previous year, with MMR/MMRV down by more than 1.3 million doses.

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 infectious disease outbreak 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. In fact, making sure children receive their ACIP-recommended vaccines will be key in ensuring that more schools can reopen safely. 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* in the next COVID-19 legislative package.

The *Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act* provides much needed funding to state and local public health departments to develop, scale, and evaluate local initiatives to boost vaccination rates during the COVID-19 pandemic. It would do so by strengthening partnerships with local stakeholders such as health care providers, schools, vaccine coalitions, and community-based organizations, disseminating culturally and linguistically appropriate information through communities and online social media platforms, and conducting outreach to promote health insurance options and immunization programs like Vaccines for Children, among other efforts.

While it is understandable that Congress is focused on the development and distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine and immunizing as many Americans as possible against COVID-19, 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 include the *Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act* during the next COVID-19 legislative package.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families
Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
American Association on Health and Disability
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians
American Institute of Dental Public Health
American Lung Association
American Pediatric Society
American Public Health Association
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Biotechnology Innovation Association (BIO)
Bridge the Gap – SYNGAP Education and Research Foundation
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Specialty Care Coalition
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
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
March of Dimes
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
National Perinatal Association
National WIC Association
Nemours Children's Health System
NICU Parent Network
Pediatric Endocrine Society
Pediatric Policy Council
PremieWorld.com
School-Based Health Alliance
Society for Pediatric Research
The Andrew McDonough B+ Foundation
The Mended Hearts, Inc.
Trust For America's Health
Unity Consortium
Vaccinate Your Family

State and Local Organizations

Alana's Foundation (Michigan)
Alliance for Immunizations in Michigan
Arizona Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Arizona Partnership for Immunization
Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
California Chapter 1, American Academy of Pediatrics
California Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics
California Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics
Children's Defense Fund (Texas)
Children's Wisconsin
Common Good Iowa
Delaware Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Ever Thrive Illinois
Family Voices New Jersey
Florida Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Hawaii Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Idaho Immunization Coalition
Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Indiana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Iowa 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, American Academy of Pediatrics
Michigan Allergy and Asthma Society
Michigan Association of Health Plans
Michigan Association of Osteopathic Family Physicians
Michigan Association of School Nurses
Michigan Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health
Michigan Council of Nurse Practitioners
Michigan Osteopathic Association
Michigan Pharmacists Association
Michigan State Medical Society
Mississippi Center for Justice
Missouri Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Montana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Nebraska Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Nevada Public Health Association
New Mexico Pediatric Society
New York Chapter 1, American Academy of Pediatrics
New York Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics
New York Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics

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
Rhode Island Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan
South Dakota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
Tennessee Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
The Children's Agenda (New York)
The Emily Stillman Foundation (Michigan)
Utah Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Vermont Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Virginia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Washington Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Wisconsin Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics