



October 7, 2019

The Honorable Kevin McAleenan
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20528

Robert R. Redfield, M.D.
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329-4207

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Jerome M. Adams, M.D.
Surgeon General of the United States
Office of the Surgeon General
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Acting Secretary McAleenan, Secretary Azar, Director Redfield, and Surgeon General Adams:

As organizations representing medical professionals, the public health community and individuals who are immunocompromised, we are writing to urge the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to reconsider its decision to not vaccinate families in the custody of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) against influenza (flu). The deaths of three children in CBP custody from influenzaⁱ have been deeply troubling and immunizing these families against influenza and other vaccine-preventable diseases would help prevent additional tragedies.

We know Secretary Azar, Director Redfield, and Surgeon General Jerome Adams strongly believe in the value and cost savings of timely immunizations for people of all ages. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that vaccinations given to children born in the United States between 1994-2018 will prevent approximately 419 million illnesses, 26.8 million hospitalizations, and 936,000 deaths, and will save nearly \$1.9 trillion in total societal costs.ⁱⁱ

Unfortunately, every season flu causes millions of illnesses, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands or tens of thousands of deaths in the U.S. Children, pregnant women, the elderly and those with certain chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease are at particular risk of flu and its serious complications.ⁱⁱⁱ During the 2018-19 season, there were between 531,000 and 647,000 hospitalizations and between 36,400 and 61,200 deaths, including the death of 136 children, as a result of influenza.^{iv} According to a 2017 study, flu vaccinations not only lower people's risk of serious illness and hospitalizations, they can also reduce a child's risk of dying from the virus by half.^v

Influenza and many other vaccine-preventable diseases are highly contagious. Vaccinating people in custody will not only protect those individuals, but also the people who work in the CBP facilities, along with their families and their communities. According to the CDC, when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk, they can spread flu to others up to six feet away. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Children and some people with weakened immune systems may pass the flu virus to others for more than 7 days. Additionally, symptoms of flu, such as fever, muscle aches, and fatigue, usually come on suddenly, and children often have subtler signs of illness than adults.^{vi}

With the official start of the new flu season rapidly approaching and cases of the disease already being reported throughout the country, the CDC is recommending everyone over the age of six months get vaccinated by the end of October if possible.^{vii} In order for vaccines to effectively stop the spread of disease in the U.S., however, **we must ensure all people within our borders are fully vaccinated** according to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' recommendations.

For all these reasons and many more, the presence of pediatricians, primary care physicians, pediatric nurses and other health professionals who regularly treat children is vital to ensuring proper immunizations and care. Therefore, we strongly urge you to allow pediatric health professionals, as well as general healthcare professionals, greater access to children and adults detained in CBP facilities.

Experts have raised serious concerns about the risks of detention, particularly on children.^{viii} We urge you not to compound these risks by failing to immunize those in detention from potentially fatal diseases, such as flu.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Immunizations in Michigan (AIM)
American College of Physicians (ACP)
American Pharmacists Association (APhA)
American Public Health Association (APHA)
The Arizona Partnership for Immunization (TAPI)
Arkansas Immunization Action Coalition (ImmunizeAR)

Association of Immunization Managers (AIM)
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
California Immunization Coalition
Central Oklahoma Immunization Coalition
Central Pennsylvania Immunization Coalition
Colorado Children's Immunization Coalition (CCIC)
Colorado Parents for Vaccinated Communities
The Emily Stillman Foundation
EverThrive IL
Families Fighting Flu
Gerontological Society of America (GSA)
Greater Salt Lake Immunization Coalition
Hawaii Immunization Coalition
Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Idaho Immunization Coalition
Immunization Action Coalition (IAC)
Immunization Coalition of Delaware
Immunization Collaboration of Tarrant County (TX)
Immunize Kansas Coalition
Immunize Nevada
ImmunizeTN
Indiana Immunization Coalition
Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA)
Kimberly Coffey Foundation
March of Dimes
Meningitis B Action Project
National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP)
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID)
New Jersey Immunization Network
Nurses Who Vaccinate
Oklahoma Alliance for Healthy Families
Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases (PKIDs)
Pediatric Nurse Practitioner House Calls
Pennsylvania Immunization Coalition (PAIC)
PITCH – Partner Immunizing Toward Community Health (Florida)
San Francisco Immunization Coalition
Sioux Falls Area Immunization Coalition
The Immunization Partnership
Trust for America's Health (TFAH)
UNITY Consortium
Vaccinate California
Vaccinate Massachusetts
Vaccinate Your Family (VYF)

Vaccine Ambassadors

Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Voices for Vaccines

West Virginia Immunization Network, a program of the Center for Rural Health Development,
Inc

i <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/20/the-us-wont-vaccinate-migrant-children-against-the-flu-at-border-camps.html>

ii <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/protecting-children.html>

iii <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/keyfacts.htm>

iv <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm>

v <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/141/4/e20172918>

vi <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/spread.htm>

vii <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccinations.htm>

viii <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953619302138?via%3Dihub>