

Today's hearing is the first opportunity for Congress to hear testimony from Dr. Mandy Cohen since she was appointed the CDC, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Director in July.

Dr. Cohen, congratulations on your appointment. You are taking the reins of the CDC at a critical time in the agency's history and you have a heavy task ahead.

As I said at our June oversight hearing examining the CDC's COVID-19 response, "the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that we did not have the CDC we thought we had." I am looking forward to hearing about how you plan to change that.

This hearing is also an opportunity for us to hear first-hand about how CDC is responding to the ongoing respiratory virus season.

I am particularly interested in hearing about how CDC is helping to mitigate the shortage of the Respiratory Syncytial (sin
SISH ull) Virus, or RSV, immunization for all infants.

We have already heard reports that RSV cases are rising sharply in certain areas of the country and that some hospitals are in “surge” mode.

With unprecedented demand for the RSV immunizations this year leading to supply constraints, I hope we will hear what the CDC plans to do to ensure we have a sufficient supply of products for the seasons to come.

It's great that we have a safe, effective RSV immunization to protect children, but it does us little good if we don't do a better job at preventing supply constraints.

Questions remain.

How is the CDC planning to rebuild public trust in the agency?

Has the CDC learned from the mistakes it made during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Is the CDC committed to making the hard and deep reforms needed to avoid repeating those same mistakes?

While I'm looking forward to hearing your testimony on these points, I candidly haven't seen much outward evidence yet that the CDC has taken the failings of the COVID-19 pandemic to heart.

Another area I have grave concerns about is the detrimental effect extended school closures have had on kids learning.

According to a report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the average testing scores for US 13 year olds has hit the lowest level in decades.

According to a New York Times report from earlier this month, school closures led to 50 million children, including my own, being out of the classroom, causing these students to miss an extremely crucial time in their lives since they were forced to learn from home.

And let me assure you, learning from home for school aged children is not as effective as being in the classroom.

In this same report, the Times claims this “may prove to be the most damaging disruption in the history of American education.”

The damage wrought by school closures was enormous and our children will be living with its consequences for decades.

As I've said before, for better or worse, CDC recommendations and guidance carry great weight. They were used to justify not only school closures, but prohibiting nursing home visitations, and vaccine mandates that would have resulted in millions of Americans losing their jobs. In addition businesses, fitness centers and worst of all churches were closed.

Further, the discovery of an illegal biolab in Reedley California exposed more problems with the CDC.

CDC's management of the Federal Select Agent Program has been subject to criticism in the past for inadequate investigations in response to biosecurity incidents, including investigations from this subcommittee.

Reading the China Select Committee's report showed how inadequate CDC's approach to the Select Agent Program is.

CDC initially refused to even investigate the lab and only did so once they were contacted by Democratic Representative Jim Costa from California.

The CDC even refused to test any of the thousands of pathogen samples that could have contained unknown and dangerous pathogens.

The agency also failed to take meaningful action regarding a refrigerator that was labeled “Ebola” during their so-called “investigation.”

CDC’s response was totally inadequate and failed to provide any support for the local government and put the public at risk through its indifference.

This is not acceptable, and the CDC must do better.

As we look to the future, it's clear that the CDC needs more than a reset. There needs to be a seismic shift.

The Agency announced in April 2022 that they were going to undergo a reform by starting to review their processes and structures in place. Since, they have made a handful of changes but more is needed.

I know that you have not been there long enough to implement a seismic shift, but I hope we can start to see CDC guidance driven by the latest science and robust evidence.

In closing, I hope your tenure as Director will start that process and reinvigorate the agency. Thank you.