

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Health Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo**

Hearing on “Booster Shot: Enhancing Public Health through Vaccine Legislation”

June 15, 2021

Vaccines are a powerful testament to scientific genius. As President Biden said about the Covid-19 vaccine, “every shot is giving a dose of hope.”

We’ve seen the power of the safe, effective, and free Covid-19 vaccines. As they’ve become widely available, fewer Covid-19 hospitalizations and deaths are being reported each day than at any point since the pandemic began.

Covid-19 vaccines aren’t unique in their lifesaving ability. According to the CDC, routine childhood vaccinations have prevented more than 21 million hospitalizations and over 700,000 deaths among children born in the last 20 years.

But a vaccine that remains in its vial is 0% effective. That’s why the Vaccines for Children Program is one of the most important public health achievements in our nation’s history. The Vaccines for Children Program provides free and easy access to vaccines to children in low-income families. Thanks to the Program, most children are no longer vulnerable to measles or whooping cough.

But this continued success is not guaranteed. The shelter-at-home orders caused childhood vaccinations to plunge last year. According to the CDC, clinicians ordered 11.5 million fewer vaccine doses for children compared to the previous year. Gaps in vaccine rates could lead to deadly outbreaks among our nation’s children.

Fortunately, Dr. Schrier, our Subcommittee’s resident pediatrician, has introduced the bipartisan *Strengthening the Vaccines for Children Act*. The bill expands the Vaccines for Children Program to cover more children and clinicians at more locations and reduces financial or administrative barriers to boost vaccination rates. The bill provides vaccine counseling for parents which is important to address misinformation, as well as make clear to parents that vaccines are free for children, even if they’re uninsured or on Medicaid.

Representative Sewell’s *Maternal Vaccination Act* helps make sure that newborns and pregnant mothers are protected from the flu and whooping cough. By receiving the “Tdap” and flu vaccines while pregnant, mothers avoid potentially serious hospitalizations while also providing the “mother’s gift” of antibodies to their newborns.

While the benefits of maternal vaccinations are clear, our health care system does a poor job of helping pregnant women receive important vaccines. A CDC pre-pandemic survey found that only 35% of mothers receive both the Tdap and flu vaccine during pregnancy.

Vaccines are important as people age. Seniors should receive vaccines to prevent the flu, pneumonia, shingles, tetanus, and whooping cough. Representative Kuster’s bipartisan

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Protecting Seniors through Immunization Act ensures that all Medicare Part D-covered vaccines are free to beneficiaries.

Our hearing today will cover 12 bills, most of them bipartisan, that aim to ensure that every American, no matter their age, race, or income, are empowered to receive the “dose of hope” from vaccine protection.

Our communities can be completely free of vaccine-preventable diseases, including Covid-19. I look forward to hearing from our superb witnesses how the critical bills before us will help achieve this important goal.