

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
of  
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.**

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

**June 15, 2021**

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn the world’s attention to the value of vaccines. The rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines was a direct result of decades of progress in the immunization landscape, laser-focus on science and safety, historic investment by the federal government, and the courage of clinical trial participants.

While the development of these remarkable vaccines marked a huge step forward, this terrible pandemic has also made clear that we must do more to reduce incidence of all vaccine-preventable diseases. This includes taking action to raise awareness of the value of vaccines, improve vaccine-related public health infrastructure, and reduce barriers to access for these lifesaving preventive tools. That is our focus today.

One of the areas where we can most improve is on adult vaccination rates. As our witnesses will mention in their testimony today, while the vaccination rates for childhood vaccines is generally considered high, vaccination rates for adults are lower across the board.

These low vaccine rates increase the burden of vaccine-preventable disease in the United States. Each year, there are over 3,000 cases of hepatitis B, 40,000 cases of pneumococcal disease, and about one million cases of shingles. Vaccination rates in the recommended adult population for each of those diseases are all below 30 percent. Moreover, only 48 percent of adults in the United States received a flu shot during the 2019-2020 flu season.

Clearly, we need to explore ways to increase these rates and one place to look is the approach we are taking with children. After all, over 90 percent of American kindergartners receive the majority of their recommended vaccines for hepatitis, chickenpox, polio, tetanus, and measles, among others. Those are strong results but we must remain vigilant. Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported a decline in childhood vaccination rates during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, which could pose a serious public health threat.

We also know that there are significant disparities in vaccination rates by age, gender, race, ethnicity, and economic status. Black and Hispanic adults have lower vaccination rates than white adults for every recommended vaccine from the Advisory Committee on Immunization (ACIP). Only 40 percent of pregnant women receive the two vaccines recommended during pregnancy to protect the mother and unborn child. Moreover, only 23 percent of Black pregnant women and 25 percent of Hispanic pregnant women receive the recommended shots.

Coverage of vaccines by private and public health insurance plays a significant role in vaccine access, and lack of health coverage correlates with significantly lower vaccination rates.

The comprehensive collection of bills we are considering today would make significant enhancements to vaccine coverage for adults and children in Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

This includes, H.R. 1978, the Protecting Seniors Through Immunization Act, which was introduced by Representatives Kuster and Bucshon. This legislation would ensure that Medicare beneficiaries are not charged out-of-pocket costs when receiving a vaccine through Part D. And H.R. 2170, the Helping Adults Protect Immunity Act, introduced by Representative Soto, would require all state Medicaid programs to cover ACIP recommended vaccines for adults and prohibit cost-sharing.

H.R. 2347, the Strengthening the Vaccines for Children Act, introduced by Representatives Schrier, Joyce, Butterfield, and McKinley, would enhance the Vaccines for Children Program. This program provides vaccines to low-income children, by extending eligibility and boosting incentives for providers to participate in the program.

H.R. 951, the Maternal Vaccinations Act, introduced by Representative Sewell, would create a public awareness campaign for maternal vaccinations with a focus on communities with historically low vaccination rates. This bill is an important continuation of our work to address the maternal mortality and morbidity crisis in America.

And finally, I want to mention H.R. 550, the Immunization Infrastructure Modernization Act, also introduced by Representatives Kuster and Bucshon. This legislation would provide funding for significant improvements to immunization information systems. These systems are critical tools for providers and public health systems but must be brought into the 21st century information age.

Increasing immunizations in the United States will promote longer, healthier lives while saving billions of dollars in health care costs. As we climb out of this pandemic, our focus cannot be a return to the status quo. Our mandate is to build a stronger and more equitable public health system, and today's hearing on these bills is an important step.

Thank you, I yield back.