

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 10, 2025

Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We fear your recent postponement of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) proceedings may threaten the health of all Americans and cause American families to lose access to the free vaccines they rely on. Postponing this meeting could undermine confidence in the committee, its recommendations, and ultimately, vaccines themselves. While you have indicated on the Federal Register that the February ACIP meeting will be rescheduled, we urge you to do so immediately to prevent any unnecessary delays in insurance coverage for vaccines, timely outbreak response, and updates to existing recommendations.

Vaccines are a critical tool for protecting the public's health, and continued public access to vaccines relies, in part, on recommendations made by ACIP, a key advisory body that provides expert guidance on vaccines and immunization practices. At least three times a year, this committee of nonfederal experts reviews and evaluates the safety, efficacy, cost effectiveness, and consumer perspectives for vaccines, and makes recommendations for their use. Once ratified by the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), these recommendations inform the CDC's annual children and adult vaccine schedules and are used by professional medical societies to inform their practice guidelines and educational materials. Additionally, ACIP considers and makes recommendations regarding vaccines for travel and outbreak response – in fact, ACIP played a central role during the COVID-19 response.

Congress tied insurance coverage requirements to ACIP recommendations to ensure that most Americans who want safe and effective vaccines can access them for free, which has enormously reduced morbidity and mortality caused by vaccine-preventable diseases. For underserved children, we created the Vaccines for Children program, which makes vaccines affordable for every child in America under the age of 19, provides vaccines for more than half of our children, and has saved the lives of over one million children.¹ This program only covers vaccines recommended by CDC through ACIP. Similarly, for adults, we've expanded access to vaccines through the *Affordable Care Act* and the *Inflation Reduction Act*, which now require most Medicaid plans and Medicare plans to cover ACIP-recommended vaccines at no cost. Health care providers use information and recommendations from ACIP to help their patients make the best decisions to protect their health. While some vaccines are broadly recommended

¹ Zhou F, Jatlaoui TC, Leidner AJ, et al. Health and Economic Benefits of Routine Childhood Immunizations in the Era of the Vaccines for Children Program — United States, 1994–2023. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2024;73:682–685. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7331a2>

for everyone, specific patient populations – like those who are immunocompromised, infants, elderly, travelers, or have other risk factors – may need different or additional protection.

With growing concerns about Avian influenza cases in the U.S., and the threat of other emerging infections, it's critical that ACIP have the ability to meet in a timely manner to ensure Americans have access to these life-saving tools and are protected from preventable disease.

On February 20, 2025, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (HHS) chose to indefinitely postpone the February 2025 meeting of ACIP, despite the clear and critical importance of ACIP. Scheduled to take place from February 26-28, 2025, experts were planning to discuss and vote on a variety of vaccines, including meningococcal, chikungunya, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), human papillomavirus (HPV), and Mpox, among others. The committee was also set to discuss an at-home nasal spray for influenza that was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last year. This postponement comes at a time when the United States is experiencing one of the worst flu seasons in fifteen years,² in which 86 children and 19,000 adults have died.³ Additionally, the delay of the February meeting also calls into question how you and the Trump administration will handle future meetings necessary for recommending vaccines for use during emergency responses.

During your Senate confirmation hearings, you committed that vaccine review standards would not deviate from historical norms, yet this is the first time this committee meeting has been delayed since being established over 50 years ago. Compounding our concerns is the broader communications freeze across HHS that is depriving Americans, including health care providers, of information needed to make determinations about their health and health of their patients. Although this freeze has been lifted in limited circumstances, many people continue to report having difficulty receiving timely information from the CDC.

Without ACIP recommendations, millions of Americans could lose first dollar coverage – free access – to recommended FDA-approved vaccines and health care providers may not have access to analysis of the most up-to-date data on vaccines.

Now is not the time to play politics with ACIP or any other public health advisory committee. Americans deserve timely and affordable access to vaccines. We urge you to reschedule the ACIP immediately. We also request responses to the following questions and requests for information by no later than Wednesday, March 12 at 5 p.m.

1. Do you commit to reschedule the February ACIP meeting before the end of March?
2. Do you commit to keep current ACIP members on the Committee for the remainder of their terms?

² American Medical Association. (2025, February 15). *Worst flu season: Influenza virus spread, new bird flu cases in the U.S., plus measles outbreak update* | AMA Update Video | AMA. American Medical Association. <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/worst-flu-season-influenza-virus-spread-new-bird-flu-cases-us-plus>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, February 15). *Weekly US Influenza Surveillance Report: Key Updates for Week 7, ending February 15, 2025* | FluView | CDC. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/fluview/surveillance/2025-week-07.html>

3. Do you commit to ensuring the June and October 2025 meetings move forward as scheduled?
4. Do you commit to not changing the ACIP charter prior to its date of renewal?
5. Will you immediately lift the communication freeze to ensure that health care providers, public health stakeholders, and the American public have access to vital information on vaccines and other critical public health issues?

Sincerely,



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator



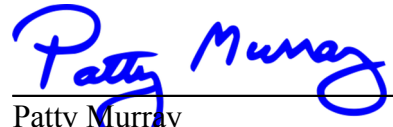
Charles E. Schumer
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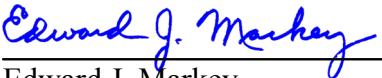
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