

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 3, 2017

Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Dr. Fitzgerald:

Earlier this year, we wrote to request information on your agency's pandemic flu preparedness plans. We have not yet received a response to our letter, which leaves us unable to assess whether the federal government is in fact prepared to respond in the case of a pandemic flu outbreak. While we remain concerned about the state of pandemic flu preparedness, we have also become troubled by reports of the potential for a bad flu season in the United States this year. Given the Trump Administration's concerning lack of attention to public health preparedness and response efforts, we request immediate information to ensure that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are adequately prepared and working with their partners to ensure preparedness across the country.

Public health officials are warning of a particularly bad seasonal flu, given trends seen earlier this year. The Southern Hemisphere experienced a worse-than-usual flu season in recent months, with Australia in particular seeing more than double the number of cases compared to the average caseload in the last five years.¹ Australia saw higher numbers of the H3N2 virus this year, which is typically associated with higher numbers of hospitalizations and deaths. In the influenza surveillance report released by the CDC last week, 87 percent of positive cases so far have been the H3N2 virus. Dr. Daniel Jernigan, Director of the CDC's Influenza Division, told reporters, "there's a chance we could have a season similar to Australia."² Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), agreed that "[i]n general, we get in our season what the Southern Hemisphere got in the season immediately preceding us," meaning an "intelligent guess" is that the United States will have a similarly bad flu season.³

Given this potential for a bad flu season this year, we are especially concerned for the individuals and families displaced by recent natural disasters. The hurricanes that have devastated Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Texas, and Florida and the wildfires in the West have left countless families without access to power, their homes, and their belongings. Such displacement tends to interrupt normal medical routines. Additionally, for those living in shelters or with family members, viruses can pass more easily in these crowded environments. This combination of circumstances leaves many individuals vulnerable to infection.

¹ https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/19/world/australia/flu-vaccination-deaths.html?_r=0

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/flu-season-could-be-bad/>

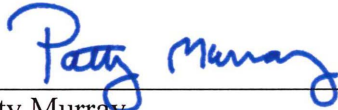
³ <http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/03/health/australia-bad-flu-season/index.html>

We trust that you share our concern about the potential for a severe seasonal flu season that could infect millions across the country and that you understand our interest in ensuring that the federal government is prepared to respond. Please provide written responses to the following questions by no later than November 16, 2017:

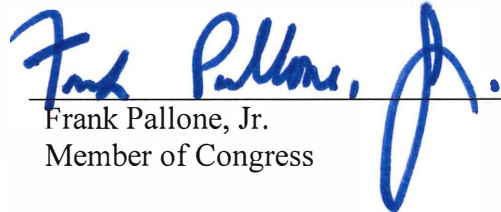
1. How has the hiring freeze implemented across the Department earlier this year affected flu preparedness and response efforts?
2. Does the CDC have any concerns regarding the seasonal flu vaccine supply for this year?
3. What data does the CDC have so far regarding the effectiveness of this year's flu vaccine? Are there any concerns about the match between the flu strains contained in the vaccine versus what appears to be circulating thus far this season?
4. What is the CDC doing to increase seasonal flu vaccination rates, particularly among vulnerable populations, including children, pregnant women, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals?
5. What is the CDC doing to ensure that individuals displaced by the hurricanes and wildfires will have access to the seasonal flu vaccine this year? Are vaccinations being provided as part of HHS's response efforts?

Thank you in advance for your attention to this critical matter. If you have any questions, or would like to further discuss compliance with this request, please contact Andi Fristedt with Senator Murray's HELP Committee Staff at 202-224-7675 or Waverly Gordon with Congressman Pallone's Energy and Commerce Committee Staff at 202-225-3641.

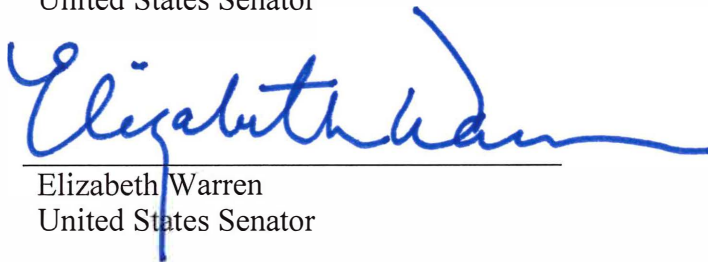
Sincerely,



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Gene Green
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress