



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE

CHAIRMAN FRANK PALLONE, JR.

MEMORANDUM

September 20, 2021

To: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Members and Staff

Fr: Committee on Energy and Commerce Staff

Re: Hearing on “Putting Kids First: Addressing COVID-19’s Impacts on Children”

On Wednesday, September 22, 2021, at 10:30 a.m. (EDT), in the John D. Dingell Room, 2123 of the Rayburn House Office Building, and via Cisco WebEx online video conferencing, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will hold a hearing entitled, “Putting Kids First: Addressing COVID-19’s Impacts on Children.” The hearing will explore the impacts of the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic on children and adolescents in the United States.

I. BACKGROUND

Since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced the first reported case of COVID-19 in the United States on January 21, 2020, nearly 42 million Americans have contracted the virus leading to more than 670,000 related deaths, including more than 500 deaths among youth under age 18.¹ COVID-19 can be asymptomatic or cause a range of symptoms and duration, typically more severe among older adults and people with underlying medical conditions, and has disproportionately affected people of color.² The Delta variant, which spreads faster than earlier forms of the virus, currently accounts for 98.9 percent of all new

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *First Travel-related Case of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Detected in United States* (January 21, 2020) (press release); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID Data Tracker: United States COVID-19 Cases, Deaths, and Laboratory Testing (RT-PCR) by State, Territory, and Jurisdiction* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html) (accessed Sept. 19, 2021); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Provisional COVID-19 deaths by age group, by sex: United States* (data.cdc.gov/NCHS/Deaths-by-Sex-Ages-0-18-years/xa4b-4pzv) (accessed Sept. 19, 2021).

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Symptoms of COVID-19* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID-19 Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021).

COVID-19 cases in the United States.³ The seven-day moving averages of daily new COVID-19 cases has increased significantly since July 1, 2021, and there has been a recent dramatic increase in the number of COVID-19 cases among children.⁴

II. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Since March 2020, the number and rate of COVID-19 cases among children have steadily increased.⁵ The number of pediatric cases has increased by nearly 240 percent since July 2021.⁶ From June to mid-August, the COVID-19 associated hospitalization rate among children up to age four increased ten-fold and reached the highest level since the start of the pandemic in early September.⁷ The surge in children's hospitalizations is particularly acute in states with lower vaccination rates.⁸ Additionally, as among adults, COVID-19 has disproportionately affected certain children, particularly those who are disabled, immigrants, or American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic youth.⁹

Like adults, most children who survive COVID-19 infection recover completely, though research is ongoing to determine how common long-COVID—lingering symptoms of fatigue,

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID Data Tracker: Variant Proportions* (covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID-19: About the Variants* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021).

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Trends in Number of COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in the U.S. Reported to CDC, by State/Territory* (covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailytrendscases) (accessed Sep. 10, 2021); American Academy of Pediatrics, *Children and COVID-19: State-Level Data Report* (www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/children-and-covid-19-state-level-data-report/) (accessed Sept. 14, 2021).

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Information for Pediatric Healthcare Providers* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/pediatric-hcp.html) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021).

⁶ *Child COVID-19 Cases Increased Nearly 240% Since July, Pediatricians' Group Says*, CNN (Sept. 13, 2021).

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Hospitalizations Associated with COVID-19 Among Children and Adolescents – COVID-NET, 14 States, March 1, 2020–August 14, 2021*, MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 20211 70:1255-1260 (Sept. 10, 2021); *Least Vaccinated States Lead Spike in Children's Cases, Leaving Some Hospitals Stretched*, New York Times (Sept. 9, 2021).

⁸ *Least Vaccinated States Lead Spike in Children's Cases, Leaving Some Hospitals Stretched*, New York Times (Sept. 9, 2021).

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021).

headache, difficulty concentrating, and insomnia—may be among children, with findings ranging from as high as 15 percent to less than one percent of children who have had the disease.¹⁰ Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome (MIS-C), the inflammation of critical organs, is an additional “rare but serious condition associated with COVID-19” that children may experience after infection.¹¹ As of August 27, 2021, the most recent date of cases reported to CDC, there have been 4,661 MIS-C patients and 41 related deaths.¹² Of the cases with available race and ethnicity information, 61 percent of MIS-C cases occurred in Hispanic or Black children.¹³

III. MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT AND OTHER EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN’S HEALTH

The impact of the pandemic on children’s health has been broader than those from COVID-19 infections. The pandemic has also placed additional burdens on the mental health of children and adolescents, exacerbating already alarming rates of poor mental health among youth.¹⁴ Changes in routine, social isolation, disruption of in-person learning, and trauma caused by the illness or loss of family or friends may be adversely affecting children’s mental health.¹⁵ In October 2020, 31 percent of parents reported that “their child’s mental or emotional health was worse than before the pandemic.”¹⁶ Further, children’s mental health related visits to emergency departments increased in 2020—from mid-March to October 2020, the proportion of mental-health visits increased by 24 percent for children ages five to 11, and 31 percent for those 12 to 17 compared to the same period in 2019.¹⁷ According to experts, a return to in-school

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19: Information for Pediatric Healthcare Providers (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/pediatric-hcp.html) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021); *Long COVID and kids: scientists race to find answers*, *Nature* (July 14, 2021).

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Health Department-Reported Cases of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) in the United States* (covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#mis-national-surveillance) (accessed Sept. 19, 2021).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Mental Health and Substance Use Considerations Among Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, KFF (May 26, 2021); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Adolescent and School Health – Mental Health (www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health/index.htm) (accessed Sept. 14, 2021).

¹⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID-19 Parental Resources Kit*, (www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/parental-resources/index.html) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021).

¹⁶ *Mental Health and Substance Use Considerations Among Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Kaiser Family Foundation (May 26, 2021).

¹⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United*

learning may help mitigate many of the social and mental consequences of the pandemic, though they also concur that this must be done safely.¹⁸

Children are also missing or delaying necessary health check-ups and vaccinations due to the pandemic, creating a heightened risk for other health concerns.¹⁹ In 2020, there was an estimated 27 percent decrease in pediatric visits.²⁰ According to CDC, 11.7 million fewer doses of routine vaccines were administered in 2020 compared to 2019, including an 18.9 percent reduction in the tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap) vaccine and a 15.1 percent reduction in the meningococcal conjugate vaccine.²¹

Further, pediatric diseases that normally rise and fall in predictable seasonal patterns were uncharacteristically low through the earlier portion of the pandemic, only to recently spike.²² For instance, hospitals are currently reporting unusual trends in the number of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) cases, a highly contagious respiratory illness that typically peaks in the fall and winter.²³ While RSV cases, like influenza, dropped dramatically earlier in the pandemic, cases have begun to spike in summer months.²⁴ The combination of an increase in cases of COVID-19 and the out-of-season spike of other children's diseases has led to an incredible strain on pediatric hospitals.²⁵ Children's hospitals around the country report nearing or being at both workforce and physical capacity.²⁶

States, January 1–October 17, 2020, MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2020; 69:1675 – 1680 (Nov. 13, 2020).

¹⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html) (accessed Sept. 13, 2021); *AAP Urges In-Person Learning, Masking in Updated Guidance on Safe Schools*, American Academy of Pediatrics (July 18, 2021).

¹⁹ Kaiser Family Foundation, *Back to School Amidst the New Normal: Ongoing Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Children's Health and Well-Being* (Aug. 13, 2021).

²⁰ The Commonwealth Fund, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Outpatient Visits in 2020: Visits Remained Stable, Despite a Late Surge in Cases* (Feb 22, 2021).

²¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Clinical Considerations for Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccination in Adolescents* (May 12, 2021).

²² Cleveland Clinic, *What to Know About the Unusual RSV Outbreak* (Aug. 13, 2021).

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *'This is real': Fear and Hope in an Arkansas Pediatric ICU*, Washington Post (Aug. 13, 2021); *Least Vaccinated States Lead Spike in Children's Cases, Leaving Some Hospitals Stretched*, New York Times (Sept. 9, 2021).

²⁶ *Respiratory Infections Other Than COVID-19 Are Filling Up Pediatric Wards*, CNN (Aug. 26, 2021); *Children's Hospitals Are Pleading for Federal Help as They Run Out of Beds*, NPR (Sept. 1, 2021).

IV. COVID-19 VACCINES AND CHILDREN

Three COVID-19 vaccines have been authorized or approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and have been proven safe and effective at preventing severe illness and death due to the virus among authorized populations.²⁷ Among the three available vaccines, Moderna's and Johnson and Johnson's vaccines are available for adults ages 18 and older.²⁸ Only one, developed by Pfizer, is authorized for use among adolescents as young as 12 years old.²⁹ As of September 16, 2021, more than 383 million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered in the United States, and more than 180 million Americans are fully vaccinated.³⁰ Despite the availability of a vaccine for adolescents 12 and older, however, the vaccination rate among adolescents is lower than the rate among adults.³¹ As of September 15, 2021, just 42 percent of youth ages 12 to 15 were fully vaccinated, compared to nearly 66 percent of adults ages 18 and older.³²

No vaccine is currently authorized for use among children under age 12.³³ Phase 3 trials of COVID-19 vaccines for children under 12 are ongoing.³⁴ In July 2021, at FDA's request,

²⁷ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Learn More About COVID-19 Vaccines from the FDA* (www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/learn-more-about-covid-19-vaccines-fda) (accessed May 18, 2021).

²⁸ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine* (www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/moderna-covid-19-vaccine) (accessed Sept. 14, 2021); U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine* (www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/janssen-covid-19-vaccine) (accessed Sept. 14, 2021).

²⁹ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Comirnaty and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine* (www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/comirnaty-and-pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine) (accessed Sept. 14, 2021).

³⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID Data Tracker: COVID-19 Vaccinations in the United States* (covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations) (accessed Sept. 17, 2021).

³¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevent, *COVID Data Tracker: Vaccination Demographics Trends* (covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccination-demographics-trends) (accessed Sept. 19, 2021).

³² *Id.*; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID Data Tracker: COVID-19 Vaccinations in the United States* (covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations_vacc-total-admin-rate-total) (accessed Sept. 19, 2021).

³³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021).

³⁴ *FDA asks Pfizer, Moderna to Test Their Vaccines in More Children to Help Rule Out Safety Issues*, Washington Post (July 26, 2021); *At the F.D.A.'s Urging, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna Are Expanding Their Trials for Children 5 to 11*, New York Times (July 26, 2021).

sponsors expanded the participant size of trials for two of these vaccine candidates to better assess the risk of myocarditis and pericarditis, two rare but potentially harmful side effects related to inflammation of the heart.³⁵ Pfizer is reportedly on track to submit a request for an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for use of its vaccine among children ages five to 11 in early October 2021 and filing for an EUA for kids six months to five years old in early November.³⁶ On September 10, 2021, FDA issued a statement stressing it will “follow the science” in assessing the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines for children and that once an EUA request is submitted, the agency will “complete its review as quickly as possible, likely in a matter of weeks rather than months.”³⁷ Experts have stressed that until a vaccine is available for this vulnerable population, the most important thing that can be done to protect children is for those who are 12 years of age and older to get vaccinated.³⁸

V. FEDERAL GUIDANCE AND ACTIONS TO PROTECT CHILDREN

Throughout the pandemic, CDC has issued guidance resources for a range of audiences.³⁹ On July 27, 2021, in response to new Delta variant evidence, CDC updated its guidance, including the recommendations that fully vaccinated Americans wear masks in indoor settings in areas of “substantial or high transmission” and universal indoor mask wearing for anyone in a school setting.⁴⁰ On August 5, 2021, CDC issued updated guidance for educators and school administrators emphasizing “implementing layered prevention strategies”—such as promoting vaccination for those eligible, mask wearing, physically distancing, conducting screening testing, and improving ventilation—to reduce COVID-19 transmission and keep schools safe, particularly for younger children not yet eligible for COVID-19 vaccination.⁴¹

³⁵ *At the F.D.A.’s Urging, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna Are Expanding Their Trials for Children 5 to 11*, New York Times (July 26, 2021, updated Sept. 11, 2021).

³⁶ *Pfizer Plans to Seek Vaccine Authorization in November for Kids Under 5*, The Hill (Sept. 15, 2021).

³⁷ Food and Drug Administration, *FDA Will Follow the Science On COVID-19 Vaccines for Young Children* (Sept. 10, 2021) (press release).

³⁸ *How to Protect Children Under 12 From Covid-19 According to Fauci*, CNN (Sept. 7, 2021); American Academy of Pediatrics, *COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools* (www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/) (accessed Sept. 13, 2021).

³⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guidance for COVID-19* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/guidance.html) (accessed Sept. 14, 2021).

⁴⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html) (accessed Sept. 14, 2021).

⁴¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K – 12 Schools* (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html) (accessed Sept. 14, 2021).

The Biden Administration has undertaken efforts to ensure that children can safely return to in-person education, including recently directing resources to increase the vaccination rate of youth age 12 and older and providing 100 percent reimbursement to states “for costs associated with the safe opening and operation” of schools.⁴² In response to the pandemic, Congress has provided additional funding to protect children, their families, and communities from COVID-19 and its effects. Passage of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, for instance, provided CDC with \$8.5 billion for vaccine distribution, administration, and confidence activities, \$10 billion for COVID-19 screening in schools, and \$14.2 million to expand access to much-needed pediatric mental health care.⁴³ Further, the law expanded the Child Tax Credit, which has helped families achieve and maintain greater financial stability.⁴⁴

On September 15, 2021, the Committee passed the Build Back Better Act, which would further address the health needs of children and adolescents, including provisions providing funds to strengthen public health preparedness, infrastructure, and workforce—including Children’s Hospital Graduate Medical Education; investments in children’s mental health programs and funds for the modernization and renovation of behavioral health centers; investments in vaccine confidence activities; and the permanent extension of the Children’s Health Insurance Plan.⁴⁵

VI. WITNESSES

The following witnesses have been invited to testify:

Lee Savio Beers, M.D., F.A.A.P.

President

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

Margaret G. Rush, M.D.

President

Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt

Arthur Evans Jr., Ph.D.

Chief Executive Officer

⁴² The White House, *Fact Sheet: Biden Administration Announces Additional Actions to Help Kids Go Back to School Safely* (Aug. 5, 2021); The White House, *Fact Sheet: President Biden to Announce New Actions to Protect Americans from COVID-19 and Help State and Local Leaders Fight the Virus* (Aug. 18, 2021).

⁴³ American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2.

⁴⁴ United States Census Bureau, *Household Pulse Survey Collected Responses Just Before and Just After the Arrival of the First CTC Checks* (Aug. 11, 2021); *Just One Child Tax Credit Payment Reduced Financial Anxiety for 56% of Families*, CNBC (Aug 19, 2021).

⁴⁵ House Committee on Energy and Commerce, *Markup of the Build Back Better Act, Full Committee* (energycommerce.house.gov/committee-activity/markups/markup-of-the-build-back-better-act-full-committee-september-13-2021) (accessed Sept. 16, 2021).

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