



April 30, 2021

Health Leaders Call for Robust Federal Funding to Ensure Readiness for Potential Flu Pandemic

Coalition to Stop Flu Marks First Anniversary

WASHINGTON, DC – Leaders from across the U.S. public health and health care sectors call for the federal government to learn from the shortcomings of its Covid-19 response and ensure the country is better equipped to save lives from both seasonal and pandemic influenza by increasing funding for the influenza ecosystem in upcoming spending packages. The Coalition to Stop Flu (<http://www.flucoalition.org>), a new multi-sector advocacy coalition dedicated to ending deaths from seasonal and pandemic influenza, marks its first anniversary this month.

“The U.S. response to Covid-19 has revealed significant gaps and the consequences of insufficient, unstable funding for all elements of our public health and health care ecosystem to prevent, detect, and treat respiratory infectious diseases,” said former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, Chairman of the Coalition. “Influenza occurs seasonally every year and throughout history has caused devastating pandemics. As Congress considers President Biden’s American Jobs Plan, they should support his request for \$30 billion over four years to protect Americans from future pandemics, including influenza.”

CDC estimates that influenza kills between 12,000-61,000 Americans a year. However, the 1918 influenza pandemic killed an estimated 675,000 Americans.

“As a parent who nearly lost a child to influenza complications, I cannot stress enough the importance of learning from this pandemic and making sure it never happens again in this country,” said Shelle Allen, President of Families Fighting Flu, an Executive Committee member of the Coalition to Stop Flu. “We can end deaths from seasonal and pandemic flu. That’s why we joined the Coalition to Stop Flu – to ensure federal funding for the influenza ecosystem is prioritized and increased.”

Last year, the federal government issued the National Influenza Vaccine Modernization Strategy to build a domestic influenza vaccine enterprise that is highly responsive, flexible, scalable, and more efficient at reducing the impact of seasonal and pandemic influenza viruses. The Coalition supports implementation of this important strategy and believes real and swift change is possible.

“The 2020-2021 flu season was very mild, due to Covid measures and CDC’s efforts to increase influenza vaccinations. This fall, as we start to resume normal activities, returning to school and work, we risk experiencing outbreaks of endemic influenza that have been suppressed during the Covid-19 pandemic.” said Tara Charvat, Senior Director of US Marketing and Customer Experience at Seqirus, an Executive Committee member of the Coalition to Stop Flu. “To strengthen our domestic influenza vaccine enterprise, we need sustainable public-private partnerships between industry and the federal government.”

The economic costs of Covid-19 in the United States are estimated to be \$16 trillion, assuming the virus is contained by the fall of 2021. Every year, influenza poses a public health risk as the virus' genetic makeup drifts incrementally, and with the risk of shifting enough to become much more virulent and transmissible.

“Our state and local health departments are a critical part of our influenza and Covid-19 ecosystems,” said Carolyn McCoy, Senior Director at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, an Executive Committee member of the Coalition to Stop Flu. “We joined the Coalition to help make sure this public health workforce and infrastructure is funded on a sustainable basis – which is critical to making testing, vaccines and treatments available across all populations.”

The 2020-21 influenza season has been unusual as incidence rates have been significantly lower than in prior years. Experts believe that this development is likely due to the interventions undertaken to suppress Covid-19 transmission, such as social distancing, school closures, wearing masks, and restrictions on travel, as well as a focus on increased influenza vaccinations. The country should fund the entire seasonal and pandemic influenza ecosystem to make sure we are not caught short in the fall.

About the Coalition to Stop Flu

The Coalition to Stop Flu is a multi-sector advocacy coalition dedicated to ending deaths from seasonal and pandemic influenza. The Coalition's federal policy agenda is aimed at saving lives, saving money, and protecting public health by enhancing the U.S. influenza ecosystem, including ensuring adequate funding for priority influenza programs.

The members of the Coalition to Stop Flu are: Alvogen; American Heart Association; American Society for Microbiology; ApiJect; Association of Public Health Laboratories; Association of State and Territorial Health Officials; Cidara Therapeutics; CVS Health; Families Fighting Flu; Genentech; GlaxoSmithKline; Immunization Action Coalition; Infectious Diseases Society of America; Inovio; National Association of City and County Health Officials; National Foundation for Infectious Diseases; Novavax; Sanofi; Seqirus; Trust for America's Health; Vir Biotechnology.

For more information about the Coalition to Stop Flu, please contact Niki Carelli, Executive Director, at niki@daschlegroup.com or 202-508-3451.

###