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Health Care Leaders Unite to Form Coalition to Stop Flu

Multi-Sector Advocacy Organization Will Be Dedicated to Ending Deaths from Seasonal and Pandemic Influenza

WASHINGTON, DC – Leaders from across the U.S. health care sector announced today the formation of the Coalition to Stop Flu (<http://www.flucoalition.org>), a new multi-sector advocacy coalition dedicated to ending deaths from seasonal and pandemic influenza.

“As our country grapples with the worst public health crisis of our lifetimes, the consequences of years of underfunding our health care infrastructure and research and development are becoming clear,” said former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, Chairman of the Coalition. “The infrastructure used for the COVID-19 response today is the same infrastructure that was built to address seasonal and pandemic flu. The federal government must dedicate sustainable annual funding to strengthening our public health sector and developing the vaccines, preventives, diagnostics, and treatments needed to end the threat of seasonal flu and protect us from the next pandemic.”

CDC estimates that influenza kills between 12,000-61,000 Americans a year, and there have been 155 pediatric deaths in the 2019-2020 season alone. A difficult flu season has made the COVID-19 response in the United States even more challenging, as the two viruses can produce similar symptoms.

"Our nation has just been reminded that a devastating respiratory disease pandemic can emerge anywhere, at any time, and spread around the globe with great speed. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic does not erase the continued threat of a serious influenza pandemic," said Dr. Nancy Messonnier, CDC's Director for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. "Additionally, seasonal influenza is a certainty. We have said for years that we need to bolster domestic capacity to detect and characterize influenza threats and prevent influenza through vaccination. This is as true now as ever."

The Coalition to Stop Flu will work with Congress and the Administration to advocate for increased federal funding and proactive policy solutions to stop influenza deaths; raise awareness and prioritization for seasonal and pandemic influenza preparedness; and serve as a united voice and trusted resource for policymakers.

"Pandemic influenza is not a theoretical threat — we have experienced significant outbreaks in the past and we know we will see it again," said Dr. Robert Kadlec, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. "As we continue to battle the current COVID-19 pandemic, we must also keep an eye to the future planning and how we learn from each experience. I

am pleased to see this diverse set of stakeholders come together to help reduce deaths from both seasonal and pandemic influenza."

Despite the release of last year's Executive Order on Modernizing Influenza Vaccines in the United States to Promote National Security and Public Health, funding for seasonal and pandemic flu has not kept up with the threat. Critical public health infrastructure has suffered, and researchers and companies have lacked the federal partnerships to develop the necessary therapeutics, diagnostics, preventive therapies, and vaccines. The Coalition welcomes the increased funding to critical federal agencies as part of the COVID-19 response, and will work with Congress and the Administration to ensure that this support is sustained once the immediate crisis is past.

"As we tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, we must strengthen and enhance our public health infrastructure, which is critical to dealing with the seasonal flu," said Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro. "I have long supported funding for federal programs to this end, including sustained research into a universal flu vaccine. As Chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the Department of Health and Human Services, I am proud to help launch this exciting Coalition so we can save lives."

"Every year across the country, seasonal influenza takes the lives of many Americans," said Congressman Tom Cole. "As the former Chairman and current Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the Department of Health and Human Services, I have always prioritized funding for biomedical disease research. When more money is dedicated to research, more cures and treatments for illnesses and diseases are possible. Doing so also strengthens our preparedness for future pandemics. While I was Chairman, I was proud to lead efforts to secure yearly funding increases for the pandemic influenza program. I applaud this coalition's work and goal of making the United States a healthier place and stopping seasonal influenza deaths."

The founding members of the Coalition to Stop Flu are: American Heart Association; American Society for Microbiology; ApiJect; Association of Public Health Laboratories; Association of State and Territorial Health Officials; Cidara Therapeutics; Data Driven Health; Families Fighting Flu; Genentech, a member of the Roche Group; Georgetown Center for Global Health Science and Security; Gilead Sciences; Immunization Action Coalition; Infectious Diseases Society of America; Inovio; National Association of County and City Health Officials; National Foundation for Infectious Diseases; Novavax; Sanofi; Seqirus; Trust for America's Health; and Vir Biotechnology.

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