United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 16, 2020

Dr. Robert Redfield
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Redfield,

Thank you for your response to my previous letter regarding the burden of COVID-19 on young adults with chronic health conditions. As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) deliberates over further vaccine prioritization recommendations, I write to respectfully request that you review and take into account recent evidence on age-based disparities in hospitalizations and mortality for COVID-19 that affect young adults with chronic conditions.

Through its ongoing surveillance of COVID-19 and its effect on various populations, the CDC has identified that people with certain medical conditions are at increased risk for severe illness from the virus. CDC also continues to provide data-driven assessments of the level of risk posed to certain populations—such as children who have medical complexity—or associated with various underlying medical conditions like cancer, sickle cell disease, or chronic kidney disease.[1]

According to a recent analysis of CDC's COVID-19 case surveillance data through August 2020 by the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine, the increase in risk for hospitalization, ICU admission, and death among individuals with any comorbidity was greatest for adolescents and young adults.[2] Inequities in COVID-19 outcomes by race/ethnicity also appeared to be the most pronounced for adolescents and young adults (ages 10-39).[3]

CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recently recommended that the initial vaccine allocation in Phase 1a be distributed to health care personnel and residents of long-term care facilities—groups that have been on the frontlines of COVID-19 in high-risk locations for SARS-CoV-2 exposure and transmission.[4]

As ACIP continues to deliberate over subsequent vaccine allocation recommendations, I encourage you to keep in mind the experiences and medical risks of subgroups like young adults

[1] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html
[2] Wisk, L.E., Bhagat S., and Sharma N. COVID-19 Case Surveillance Public Use Data provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Case Surveillance Task Force from January 1 to August 30, 2020. Unpublished data.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Dooling K, McClung N, Chamberland M, et al. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' Interim Recommendation for Allocating Initial Supplies of COVID-19 Vaccine — United States, 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. ePub: 3 December 2020. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6949e1

with chronic conditions. Young adults (18-29) are exhibiting the highest COVID-19 infection rates and could end up with the greatest burden of COVID-19 and rates of transmission if placed last in line for the COVID-19 vaccine.[5] With cases continuing to rise among this population, we cannot let those among them living with chronic conditions—and subsequently heightened health risks—fall through the cracks. By often perceiving young adults as a monolithic healthy population, we run the risk of overlooking subgroups of young adults with invisible medical conditions.[6] As noted by the National Academy of Medicine and the National Research Council, young adults are also often studied as part of the broader adult age group, which masks a fuller understanding of their unique risks and needs.[7]

I appreciate the CDC's ongoing efforts to analyze and understand COVID-19's consequences with an eye towards disparities faced among at-risk subgroups, like young adults with chronic conditions and communities of color. Thank you in advance for your continued attention on this matter.

Sincerely,

Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Senator

[5] https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#demographics
[6] https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/21/health/college-young-immune-compromised-covid-wellness/index.html
[7] Committee on Improving the Health, Safety, and Well-Being of Young Adults; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Institute of Medicine; National Research Council; Bonnie RJ, Stroud C, Breiner H, editors. Investing in the Health and Well-Being of Young Adults. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2015 Jan 27. 2, Young Adults in the 21st Century. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK284782/