



Duckworth, Warren, Markey and Colleagues Urge Trump Administration to Prepare for Simultaneous Peaks of 2020 Flu Season, COVID-19 Outbreak

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WASHINGTON D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Edward J. Markey (D-MA) and a group of their Democratic colleagues in a letter to Vice President Mike Pence, head of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, regarding the Trump Administration's efforts to prepare for a resurgence of COVID-19 during this year's influenza season, which Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Robert Redfield warned could create unprecedented strain on our healthcare system. The letter urged the administration to activate the resources of the federal government now to increase capacity, supplies and vaccinations to prevent public health and medical systems from being overwhelmed by simultaneous peaks of both of these deadly infectious diseases in the fall.

Previous severe flu outbreaks by themselves have stretched the capacity of our healthcare system, leading to shortages of hospital beds and nurses. The COVID-19 pandemic, which arrived in the U.S. near the end of this year's flu season, has required hospitals to operate at maximum capacity, mobilizing additional staff and creating field hospitals to handle the overflow of patients. The combination of a COVID-19 resurgence with the annual flu outbreak is likely to strain the healthcare system even further, requiring even more supplies, funding, and staff and placing an unprecedented burden on public health systems.

"The federal government must prepare now for this alarming scenario. Now, more than any previous flu season, it is essential that people get their flu shot. One of the most important and reliable ways to reduce the severity of flu outbreaks is to promote and ensure the distribution of flu vaccinations, which save lives, while helping to reduce hospitalizations and freeing up resources for other purposes," the Senators wrote. "Now

is the time to increase production and purchasing of essential equipment, and we continue to urge the President to use the authority of the Defense Production Act, as needed, and all other available tools to increase production of PPE, testing and vaccine materials, and other needed medical supplies in order to be prepared for increased demand over the next year or more."

Already, rates of routine pediatric vaccinations have plummeted during the pandemic as parents and patients skip routine care visits for fear of contracting COVID-19. To begin to address this problem, the lawmakers urge the Administration to mobilize resources to improve flu vaccination take-up rates for both healthcare workers and the general public, including by implementing a national public information campaign to combat misinformation, and educate those who may not normally seek out the vaccine. The Senators also write that the Administration will need to plan now to build infrastructure for increased flu vaccine distribution and bolster supply chains in order to accommodate an increased demand for both the flu vaccine and for COVID-19 tests.

The lawmakers have requested responses to their letter no later than June 3, 2020.

Duckworth, Warren and Markey were joined by Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Bob Casey (D-PA), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Patty Murray (D-WA), Jack Reed (D-RI), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Tina Smith (D-MN) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD).

Full text of the letter is included [here](#) and below.