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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1004

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September 18, 2019

Tammy R. Beckham, DVM, PhD
Director, Office on HIV/AIDS and Infectious Disease Policy
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
C Street SW, Room L001, 330
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Dr. Beckham:

We write to encourage you to implement plans to increase vaccination rates against hepatitis B among adults in the United States. Hepatitis B is a disease that currently has no cure, making vaccination efforts even more essential to prevent people from suffering from this potentially deadly disease.

Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver transmitted via blood and other body fluids, including mother-to-child transmission and injection drug use. Individuals with diabetes, HIV, hepatitis C, chronic liver disease, and those on hemodialysis are at an increased risk of being infected with hepatitis B. Without proper care, 1 in 4 individuals with chronic hepatitis B will develop liver cancer, cirrhosis and/or liver failure.

Currently, up to 2.2 million individuals in the United States are infected with chronic hepatitis B and as many as two-thirds of those individuals are unaware of their infection status. Hepatitis B is one of the leading causes of liver cancer. Those with unmanaged chronic hepatitis who develop liver cancer only have an 18 percent 5-year survival rate in the United States.

In recent years, the U.S. has seen a concerning increase in acute hepatitis B infections. Nationwide, newly diagnosed cases of hepatitis B rose 20 percent in 2015, with significant regional rises, largely driven by the opioid crisis in conjunction with extremely low vaccination rates. More awareness and promotion of adult hepatitis B vaccination would alleviate this problem.

The hepatitis B vaccine was the first anti-cancer vaccine to be developed. Significant progress has been made with childhood vaccination against hepatitis B in the United States since clinical guidelines recommended universal childhood vaccination starting in the 1990s. The hepatitis B vaccine has proven to be 95 percent effective and is projected to have prevented 310 million cases of hepatitis B worldwide by 2020. Despite its success, adult hepatitis B vaccination rates have remained low for those born before the 1990s in the United States.

Although safe and effective vaccines to prevent hepatitis B are available, only 25 percent of adults in the United States are fully vaccinated against this disease. We urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to commit to increasing adult hepatitis B vaccination rates and promoting


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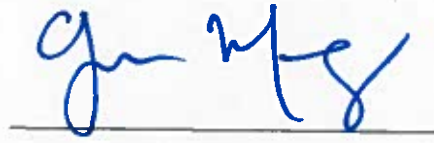
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provider and community awareness on the hepatitis B vaccination, as well as maintaining childhood hepatitis B vaccination coverage, and supporting hepatitis B testing and linkage to care.


In order to reduce the number of new hepatitis B infections and hepatitis B related deaths in the United States, we urge HHS to coordinate across its agencies and collaborate with national and community-based organizations, state and local health departments, and providers in: (1) developing and implementing a plan to improve low adult hepatitis B vaccination rates across the country, and (2) promoting awareness about the importance of hepatitis B vaccination among medical and health professionals, communities at high risk, and the general public. We appreciate your attention to this issue, and request responses regarding how you plan to address these concerns by October 21, 2019.

Sincerely,



Rep. Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress


Rep. Grace Meng
Member of Congress


Rep. Don Young
Member of Congress


Rep. Barbara Lee
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Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress


Rep. Nydia Velazquez
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Rep. Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Rep. Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Rep. Rashida Talib
Member of Congress

cc: Carolyn Wester, MD, MPH, Director, Division of Viral Hepatitis, CDC; Melinda Wharton, MD, MPH, Director, Immunization Services Division, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, CDC