

## United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400

(202) 224-5364

June 30, 2021

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPH  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dr. Walensky,

As Ranking Member of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, I write to you regarding the need to focus on protecting older Americans in light of the upcoming influenza (“flu”) season. In parallel with progress in combatting the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) must also take steps to educate healthcare providers and patients about the flu, and ways to protect older Americans in the community and across settings of care.

While flu cases were unusually low last year, there is concern among some experts that the upcoming flu season could be more severe, due to less data about the prevalent flu strains as well as reduced flu immunity in patients. Year after year, the flu takes a disproportionate toll on the elderly. According to the CDC, in the last non-COVID flu season of 2019-2020, an estimated 38 million people contracted the flu, resulting in 400,000 hospitalizations and 22,000 deaths. Additionally, 65% percent of all hospitalizations occurred in Americans age 50 and older, as well as 85% percent of all deaths.

Improving the health and welfare of older Americans is one of the top priorities of the Senate Special Committee on Aging. To support our efforts, we need to ensure that your agency is taking every possible precaution to protect seniors during the upcoming flu season. We are requesting the following information to understand how the CDC is working to mitigate the flu’s impact on the senior population, including:

1. What steps is the CDC taking to ensure there is an effective flu vaccine, given the lack of typical available data on what flu strains are most active?
2. Will the CDC be working with health professionals and others to educate Americans about the importance of getting both a COVID-19 and flu vaccine next year?
3. How is the CDC working with states to ensure an accurate data count of people who have COVID-19 versus people who have the flu?
4. How will the CDC use its resources to ensure that shots are available for seniors, especially those in underserved and rural communities?

The Senate Special Committee on Aging is committed to the safety and wellbeing of older Americans. The above questions will help Congress understand the steps being taken by the CDC to protect our seniors against influenza.

Thank you for your attention on this pivotal issue, and I look forward to your response. Please direct your reply to Parker Reynolds on the Senate Special Committee on Aging at [parker\\_reynolds@aging.senate.gov](mailto:parker_reynolds@aging.senate.gov), by July 31, 2021.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tim Scott", written over a horizontal line.

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Tim Scott  
Ranking Member  
Senate Special Committee on Aging