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17TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

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## Congress of the United States House of Representatives

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September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021

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

Dear Dr. Walensky,

Thank you for your leadership at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and for all you have done to keep Americans safe during this stage of the Covid-19 pandemic. We appreciated the CDC's July 27<sup>th</sup> update to public health guidelines, which recommended that individuals in counties with substantial and high rates of transmission wear masks indoors. However, due to the prevalence of the highly contagious Delta variant in the United States, low vaccination rates across the county, and indications that vaccine effectiveness may decrease over time, the CDC's recent guidelines do not go far enough. To save lives and curb the most recent surges in infections, the CDC should strengthen its guidelines and take the following actions as quickly as possible:

1. **Recommend all individuals 2 years and older, regardless of vaccine status, wear masks in indoor public spaces when in physical proximity to others outside their household, and in all high-density outdoor settings.** The CDC's July 27<sup>th</sup> guidelines, which are based on county-wide transmission rates, further complicate our existing patchwork of national, state, and local policies, creating unnecessary confusion. They also place the burden of enforcement on health care workers and essential workers, who are more likely to be exposed to Covid-19 due to the nature of their employment. Finally, while Covid-19 vaccines are effective at preventing severe illness and death from the virus, no vaccine is 100 percent effective. A national mask mandate will help to protect medically vulnerable patients, children, and infants who cannot be vaccinated, and immunocompromised individuals for whom vaccines may be less effective.
2. **Update Covid-19 guidance to fully recognize aerosol transmission.** Covid-19 guidance created by the Trump Administration, including dangerous crisis standards that allow for reuse of single-use personal protective equipment (PPE), is still in place, enabling weaker protocols at the state and local levels. The CDC should update these guidelines, prioritizing engineering controls, such as ventilation and air filtration, and respiratory protection, and revoking crisis standards for PPE.

3. **Require tracking and reporting of Covid-19 infections for essential workers.** At present, there is still no streamlined, national system to track Covid-19 infections among essential workers. Timely and accurate data remains important to an effective pandemic response and protecting nurses and other health care workers. The data collected should be anonymized and personally identifiable information should be redacted when collected to protect the privacy of our frontline workers.
4. **Track infections in people who are fully vaccinated, including mild and asymptomatic infections.** Careful study of breakthrough infections in fully vaccinated individuals is critical to determining vaccine effectiveness and duration of vaccine protection or whether emerging coronavirus variants are becoming more resistant to vaccines.

As case numbers, hospitalizations, and deaths have dramatically increased over the past several weeks, stronger guidelines are necessary to ensure public safety. The pandemic is not over, but implementing stronger guidelines would save countless lives and expedite a full recovery. Once again, we thank you for your continued leadership during such an incredibly challenging time, and we appreciate your full and fair consideration of this inquiry.

Sincerely,



Ro Khanna  
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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

Marie Newman  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary, US Department of Health and Human Services; The Honorable Marty Walsh, Secretary, US Department of Labor; Mr. Jeffrey Zients, White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator