

EDWARD J. MARKEY
MASSACHUSETTS

COMMITTEES:

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

CHAIR:

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CLEAN AIR, CLIMATE, AND
NUCLEAR SAFETY

FOREIGN RELATIONS

CHAIR:

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EAST ASIA, THE PACIFIC,
AND INTERNATIONAL CYBERSECURITY POLICY

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

CHAIR:

U.S. SENATE CLIMATE CHANGE TASK FORCE

United States Senate

SUITE SD-255
DIRKSEN BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2107
202-224-2742

975 JFK FEDERAL BUILDING
15 NEW SUBBURY STREET
BOSTON, MA 02203
617-565-8519

222 MILLIKEN BOULEVARD, SUITE 312
FALL RIVER, MA 02721
508-677-0523

1550 MAIN STREET, 4TH FLOOR
SPRINGFIELD, MA 01103
413-785-4610

August 9, 2021

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

Dear Director Walensky,

I write regarding ongoing COVID-19 vaccination efforts by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the continuing need to protect vulnerable individuals from COVID-19. To date, more than 168 million Americans have been fully vaccinated with an approved COVID-19 vaccine. This represents 50 percent of the total U.S. population, and 58 percent of the population eligible to receive a vaccine¹. Although it is imperative that the United States continue to vaccinate more individuals against COVID-19, I encourage the CDC to evaluate the potential need for additional “booster” doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, particularly for vulnerable groups such as the immunocompromised and seniors.

After a period of sustained decline, COVID-19 cases have again surged in the United States, driven by the highly contagious B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant. According to CDC data, an average of 97,000 new COVID-19 cases have been reported each of the last seven days.² This is the highest seven-day case average since February 11, 2021, when vaccines were not widely available.

The B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant continues to challenge existing approaches to public health in the United States and around the world. On July 29, 2021, after Israel experienced a resurgence of COVID-19 cases similar to the United States, the Israeli government announced it would begin offering citizens 60 years of age and older a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.³ This decision followed Israeli researchers’ analysis of Israeli Ministry of Health data that suggested potential declining efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines for individuals who were several months post-vaccination.⁴ Further, the governments of

¹ *COVID-19 Vaccination in the United States*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Aug. 10, 2021), https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations_vacc-people-onedose-pop-pop18.

² *Trends in Number of COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in the US Reported to CDC, by State/Territory*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Aug. 10, 2021), https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailytrendscases.

³ Patrick Kingsley, *Israel will give third Covid vaccine shots to those 60 and older*, N.Y. Times (Jul. 29, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/29/world/middleeast/israel-third-shot-covid-vaccine.html>.

⁴ Carl Zimmer, *Israeli Data Suggest Possible Waning in Effectiveness of Pfizer Vaccine*, N.Y. Times (Jul. 28, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/23/science/covid-vaccine-israel-pfizer.html>.

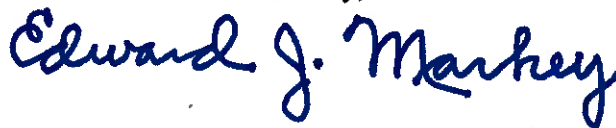
Germany and France have also announced plans to offer booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to vulnerable populations, particularly older individuals.⁵

As we enter a new phase of the battle against COVID-19, the federal government must remain nimble against novel threats posed by the virus. To better understand and help inform the public of the CDC's approach to booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines, I respectfully ask you to respond to the following questions in writing by August 31, 2021.

1. A recent analysis of clinical trial data found reduced vaccine efficacy six months post-vaccination.⁶ Does the CDC believe booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines are necessary to ensure fully vaccinated individuals continue to be protected from COVID-19 and its variants such as B.1.617.2 (Delta)?
2. Does clinical trial evidence of declining efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines concern the CDC?⁷
3. Has the CDC been in contact with the Israeli government about its decision to offer booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines to individuals over the age of 60? If so, what has the CDC conveyed to the Israeli government, and what, response, if any, has the CDC received?
4. Does the CDC plan to recommend booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines for high-risk groups such as immunocompromised individuals or seniors? Does the CDC plan to recommend booster COVID-19 vaccines for other groups? If so, how?
5. The CDC recently found that vaccinated individuals infected with the B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant can transmit COVID-19.⁸ Does the CDC believe that booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines would help curb the spread of the B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant and others?
6. Would booster doses of the vaccine need to be reformulated to better respond to COVID-19 variants or would booster doses of the existing COVID-19 vaccine provide sufficient protection against the virus?

Thank you in advance for your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

⁵ Katrin Bennhold, *Germany Will Offer Vaccine Booster Shots Starting in September*, N.Y. Times (Aug. 2, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/02/world/europe/coronavirus-booster-shots-germany.html>.

⁶ Stephen J. Thomas et al., *Six Month Safety and Efficacy of the BNT162b2 mRNA COVID-19 Vaccine*, medRxiv, (Jul. 28, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.07.28.21261159>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (July 28, 2021), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>.