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Customs and Border Patrol's Flu Vaccine Policy Breaches Basic Public Health Tenet

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Statement from IDSA President Cynthia Sears, MD, FIDSA, HIVMA Chair W. David Hardy, MD, SHEA President Hilary Babcock, MD, MPH, FIDSA, FSHEA, PIDS President Paul Spearman, MD, FPIDS, and ASTMH President Chandy C. John, MD, MS:

The U.S. Customs and Border Patrol's decision to withhold vaccinations against seasonal influenza from migrants in border detention facilities is a violation of the most basic principles of public health and human rights. It runs directly counter to the imperative that no individual should be harmed as a result of being detained, and that the community standard of medical care be available to persons in the custody of the U.S. government.

An essential tool in protecting both individual and public health, vaccinations against potentially life-threatening and preventable illnesses are an indispensable component of routine healthcare. Since 2010, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended annual influenza vaccination for ALL persons 6 months of age or older in the absence of medical reasons not to be vaccinated, a recommendation that, as organizations of more 16,000 infectious diseases specialists, we stand firmly behind. According to the CDC, seasonal influenza was associated with over 57,000 deaths – 129 in children—during the recent 2018-2019 season. In conditions of overcrowding poor sanitation and emotional stress involving vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and young children, choosing not to follow the CDC recommendations is particularly egregious.

The Infectious Diseases Society of America, the HIV Medicine Association, the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America, and the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene call for the immediate articulation and implementation of a plan to administer vaccinations against seasonal influenza and to ensure the delivery of all other routine medical immunizations in facilities under the oversight of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. We remain deeply concerned about the treatment of immigrants at our borders and in federal detention, and we call for a comprehensive investigation of the agency's protocol for providing health care at its facilities.

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