



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

**In celebration of National Infant Immunization Week,
Support the National Immunization Program**

In recognition of National Infant Immunization Week, April 25 - May 1, I hope you will take the time to learn more about efforts in your community to raise awareness and promote infant immunizations. Childhood immunizations have changed the landscape of pediatric care in the past century by eliminating the major cause of childhood suffering and death. The recommended childhood immunizations protect children against 13 vaccine preventable illnesses by the age of two including hepatitis B, polio, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella, pneumococcal disease, and influenza.

Last year's flu season hit our nation hard and tragically caused the deaths of 143 children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu epidemics result in 36,000 deaths and 114,000 hospitalizations on average in the United States every year. Even though serious illness and death occurs most frequently among the elderly, rates of infection are highest among children. A simple flu shot can protect a child from influenza and its severe complications. That is why the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recognized that young children are at increased risk for influenza-related hospitalization, and has recently recommended that all children age 6 month to 23 months receive flu vaccinations.

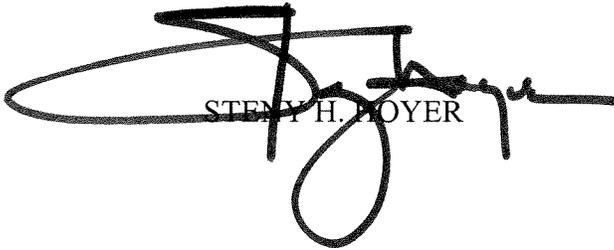
CDC has recently announced that, to better prepare for this year's flu season, it will begin stockpiling flu vaccine for children. We are pleased that CDC is taking this important step. However, the Administration has proposed a budget that would essentially freeze funding for the National Immunization Program. The National Immunization Program largely serves underinsured children who receive childhood vaccinations through their local health departments. The program includes funds for states to purchase vaccines, and for public health officials to plan and implement immunization coverage strategies.

The pressures on this program are growing. Due to new additions to the recommended vaccine schedule, the cost to fully immunize a child is rising rapidly. In 1999 it cost \$186 to fully immunize one child, five years later it costs \$472. A four-dose series of the recently added pneumococcal conjugate vaccine alone costs \$195, but is necessary to prevent ear infections, blood infections, pneumonia, and meningitis caused by this bacteria. However many states are unable to purchase and administer this vaccine.

We are concerned that, even after a \$3 million cut in FY 2004, there are no new funds in the President's budget for the National Immunization Program that would accommodate higher vaccine costs, help states purchase the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, or implement the new ACIP recommendations on flu vaccine.

National Infant Immunization Week is observed annually to promote the benefits of immunizations and to improve the health of children two years old or younger. You can learn more about activities across the country in recognition of this week at www.cdc.gov/nip/events.

Sincerely,



STEVEN H. FOYER



HENRY A. WAXMAN