

United States Senate

April 9, 2021

Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road, NE
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Walensky:

Throughout the course of the past year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been at the forefront of the United States' effort to lead the world in the fight against COVID-19 and facilitate the record-breaking development of lifesaving vaccines now being administered to millions of Americans every day. I join all Americans in offering my sincere thanks to the dedicated public servants at the CDC for this critical work.

Now, as we endeavor to contain and recover from COVID-19, I write to express my serious concern regarding the increased use of social media among Americans and the potential for negative health effects, particularly among teenagers. News reports¹ reveal that Facebook is working on a version of its Instagram app for kids under 13, and the American people deserve to understand the risks associated with the repeated and long-term use of social media platforms, especially among children and young adults.

A 2018 Pew Research survey found that nearly all U.S. teens ages 13-17 have access to a smartphone and almost half of teens are online "almost constantly."² No generation in American history has been so connected or had so much information at their fingertips. You may be aware that coinciding with this rise in social media usage, the CDC has noted that the suicide rate among U.S. teenagers is significantly and tragically rising.³ While correlation does not always indicate causation, I do believe this alarming statistic must be urgently investigated.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on all Americans, but young adults have had their lives drastically altered. With school closures and more time indoors, teens have been spending even more time on the internet and on social media. I recently

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/lifestyle-media-9086b06eacea5f64db17042cb296e36a>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr69/nvsr-69-11-508.pdf>

Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
April 9, 2021
Page Two

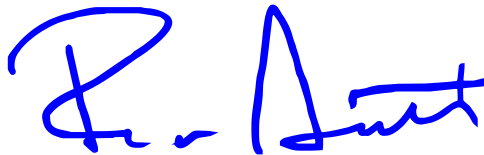
sent a letter⁴ to social media companies requesting any information they have on the extended use of their platforms by American children and young adults, and its potential impact on their health and well-being. I am hoping the CDC can also provide answers to the following questions:

- What studies exist that explore the impact of social media use on teenagers? Is this something the CDC is actively reviewing?
- What actions, if any, are you taking to warn parents and teenagers about any potential harm of using social media?
- What steps can the CDC take to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of long-term use of social media platforms by teenagers?
- What resources or authorities could Congress consider providing to the CDC to ensure the agency is able to properly understand how social media may be negatively impacting American teens, and take action to address its findings?

While Congress passed the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (15 U.S.C. §§ 6501-6506) to protect children using the internet, it does not address the health impacts of prolonged social media use. I worry that the potential impacts of long-term social media use by children and teens has not received the attention it deserves.

I look forward to your response and to continue working together to protect American families.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Tom Coderre, Acting Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use

⁴ <https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/sen-rick-scott-social-media-companies-we-need-answers-impacts-young-adults>