

United States Senate

December 9, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Secretary Becerra:

As you know, public health experts have noted the possibility of a viral threat this winter, stemming from a surge in respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

At the time of my writing, the United States is experiencing a hospitalization rate 10 times that of RSV-associated hospitalizations for the same time during the 2018 – 2019 RSV surveillance season.¹ Already, we're hearing alarming stories about the effects RSV is having on hospitals. Hospitals in Maryland have had to transfer patients out of state because they had run out of space.² Children's hospitals in Michigan³ and New York⁴ are facing similar bed shortages. Meanwhile, the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) has noted that the number of RSV cases is above-average for Florida.⁵ While it is still too early to know how RSV will develop in Florida, FDOH has already noted RSV's rising incidence in children, as well as a nine-year-high number of RSV hospitalizations for those 65 years and older.⁶ Considering the stories of hospitals in other parts of the country, there is a potential for crisis in Florida.

¹ "RSV-NET Interactive Dashboard." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/research/rsv-net/dashboard.html>

² Lisa Robinson, "Maryland hospital ERs at capacity due to RSV have had to transfer young patients out of state." *WBAL*, November 6, 2022. <https://www.wbalv.com/article/rsv-maryland-hospitals-at-capacity-transfer-patients-out-of-state/41858233#>

³ Mary Kekatos, "Michigan children's hospital says it's 100% full due to RSV surge." *ABC News*, November 11, 2022. <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/michigan-childrens-hospital-100-full-due-rsv-surge/story?id=93116061>

⁴ James T. Mulder, "Syracuse children's hospital runs out of beds as RSV surges. Some kids sent out of town." *The Post-Standard*, November 12, 2022. <https://www.syracuse.com/health/2022/11/syracuse-childrens-hospital-runs-out-of-beds-as-rsv-surges-some-kids-sent-out-of-town.html>

⁵ "Florida Department of Health monitoring above-average number of RSV cases." *CBS Miami*, November 7, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/miami/news/florida-department-of-health-monitoring-above-average-number-of-rsv-cases/>

⁶ Danielle DaRos, "Florida hospitals treating more babies, seniors for RSV." *WPEC*, November 17, 2022. <https://cbs12.com/news/local/respiratory-syncytial-virus-children-senior-citizen-department-of-health-florida>

The Honorable Xavier Becerra

December 9, 2022

Page Two

Florida families are already facing the pressures of rising food prices, energy prices, and supply chain disruptions. A surge of RSV could be detrimental to our already struggling economy, as Americans would be forced to stay home to care for themselves, their children or their parents. As those who work to care for the health and well-being of American families, we must ensure our health care systems are adequately prepared to treat rising cases. And in order to prevent a greater outbreak, HHS must have the right plans in place, be able to execute those plans, and ensure critical resources are able to be moved to where they are most needed.

To ensure we're adequately prepared, I respectfully request a response to the following questions no later than January 3, 2023:

1. What is HHS doing to address the spread of RSV?
2. What resources are available for state and municipal departments of health to curb and treat infections?
 - a. Have state and municipal departments of health been notified of all the resources available to them?
3. What is HHS doing to monitor hospital bed availability and coordinate care across county and state lines?
4. What is HHS doing to manage potential shortages of pharmaceuticals and equipment, including PPE?
5. Has HHS, through its various agencies, taken proactive action to provide information to hospitals about the resources available to them to help alleviate the strain of this outbreak on beds, staffing, and supplies?
6. In the Biden administration's recent budgetary supplemental appropriations request to Congress, HHS did not request funds for an RSV surge. Does HHS have all the resources it needs for a potential surge without raiding other health accounts?

Thank you for your and your department's work on this issue.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
United States Senator