



NATIONAL GRANGE

Elevating rural interests since 1867

1616 H St. NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006

National Grange Comment to Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices April 15 -16 Meeting

My name is Burton Eller and I am the Legislative Director of the National Grange.

The National Grange is America's oldest agricultural, rural and small-town advocacy organization. Now in its 159th year, the Grange is the only organization addressing all aspects of rural life through programs and community service and by giving voice to the concerns and issues facing rural Americans.

We want to thank the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for holding this meeting and providing an opportunity for public comment. We are proud of the work we have carried out over the years in doing our part to support the CDC and the recommendations it makes for our health and well-being. We also know that ACIP members routinely factor into their decision making the fact that those of us who live in rural America must deal with health disparities that our urban and suburban counterparts do not encounter. A 2024 report from the National Rural Health Association¹ cited many of these including:

- Significant scarcity of health care providers
- Difficulty in accessing timely care due to distance and limited public transportation
- Socioeconomic considerations
- Less insurance coverage
- Significant hospital closures
- Higher rates of serious diseases

The National Grange has worked for many years to join with healthcare, civic, non-profit and grass roots organizations to find ways to address these disparities and improve health outcomes for our families, our neighbors and ourselves. Also relevant is a 2023 study², in which researchers found that there are still “significant disparities in urban versus rural mortality for patients with influenza and pneumonia...” We believe that education and prevention are keys to changing this situation and are proud of the work we have done in advocating for prevention. From creating awareness through educational outreach on respiratory diseases to sponsoring vaccination clinics, Grange has stepped forward.

¹ <https://www.ruralhealth.us/blogs/2024/09/bridging-the-gap-addressing-health-inequities-in-rural-communities>

² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11827623/pdf/cureus-0017-00000077475.pdf>

At risk populations, whether through age, immune system conditions, or chronic disease need protection. We support the work this committee has done and continues to do to meet these needs. That is why we ask that the Committee act at this time to recommend that high risk adults age 50 and over receive the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine.

Even though the RSV vaccines are relatively new options for protection, we know that many Americans living in rural areas are embracing them to help prevent serious illness and hospital visits. Anecdotally, we routinely hear requests for this vaccine at the various vaccine clinics we have held over the past two years and believe that by offering the option earlier to those who are most vulnerable to becoming seriously ill, we can go a long way to improving public health and serving those communities with limited access to health services.

Again, we thank this committee for your continued commitment to hearing the perspectives of the public for these meetings and look forward to continuing to share the latest updated recommendations within the communities we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Burton Eller".

Burton Eller, Legislative Director
The National Grange

NOTE: The ACIP subsequently approved coverage of RSV vaccine for high risk adults age 50 and older.