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"Vaccines for Adults" Legislation Would Provide Access to Life-Saving Vaccines

WASHINGTON, DC — Today Rep. Henry A. Waxman, Rep. Sherrod Brown, and Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard introduced legislation establishing a program to provide access to recommended vaccines for uninsured and underinsured adults. The legislation is designed to ensure that all Americans have access to life-saving, cost-effective, and recommended vaccines.

"Vaccines don't save lives when they are sitting on a shelf," said Rep. Waxman. "We can protect the public health and stabilize the vaccine supply by expanding access to vaccines."

"There is no preventive measure more potent or more cost-effective than vaccination," Rep. Brown stated. "Vaccines not only prevent individual illness, but the spread of disease. From both a public health and an economic perspective, it makes sense to expand access to them."

"It is a tragedy that over 45,000 adults in this country die each year from infectious diseases that could have been prevented by a simple vaccine," said Rep. Roybal-Allard. "We must do a better job reaching and protecting the approximately 40% of adults at risk for infectious diseases who are under-immunized."

The proposed legislation would:

- **Establish the Vaccines for Adults program**. Modeled on the successful Vaccines for Children program, this initiative will provide access to recommended vaccines for uninsured and underinsured adults in public health clinics.

- **Strengthen the Supply of the Flu Vaccine**. To prevent another shortage, the legislation would expand production by authorizing a buy-back program for unsold flu vaccine.

- **Support State Immunization Efforts.** The bill increases funding for states to strengthen their vaccine outreach, tracking, and delivery.

- **Address Vaccine Shortages.** The legislation requires companies leaving the vaccine market to provide advance warning to public health officials and ensures that in the event of a vaccine shortage, public health officials can determine where available vaccine exists in their community.

In recent years, there have been shortages of several critical pediatric and adult vaccines. There are also large gaps in access. Ten states fail to provide all recommended vaccines to children, and half of all nonelderly adults in the United States lack insurance coverage for

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vaccination. Without government action, these problems will only grow as promising new vaccines are approved for use.

The legislation has been endorsed by the American Public Health Association. It has also been endorsed by Dr. Walter Orenstein, former Director of the National Immunization Program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sen. Edward Kennedy and Sen. Jack Reed introduced a companion bill in the Senate.