



August 24, 2021

Tae D. Johnson
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Acting Director Johnson:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which represents more than 133,500 family physicians and medical students across the United States, we write to urge U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to create and implement a comprehensive plan for equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines for people in ICE detention centers.

Our members see firsthand the strain that COVID-19 has put on our health care system and know that vaccination remains the most effective means to achieve control of the pandemic. The recent COVID-19 Delta variant has underscored the importance of getting vaccinated, since it is significantly more transmissible and now accounts for more than 80 percent of all COVID-19 cases in the U.S. The AAFP [believes](#) that all individuals, regardless of economic or insurance status, should have access to vaccines, especially during a pandemic. The Academy has also [called](#) for timely access to health care, including access to the influenza vaccine, for people in detention centers. As such, ICE must put processes in place to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines in detention centers and provide individuals in these facilities with the information they need to understand the benefits of vaccination. These actions are essential to advancing the President's [goal](#) of reducing racial and other health disparities.

We applaud ICE's recent success in administering the COVID-19 vaccine to over 20,000 detainees.¹ However, we remain concerned with the growing vaccine hesitancy among detainees, leading them to refuse vaccination. According to agency data, close to 6,000 individuals in ICE detention facilities have declined to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.² The number can only be expected to increase since the detainee population has increased to more than 25,000 since the beginning of the year.³

Vaccination of individuals in detention centers is vital given the increased risk of transmission in these facilities. The AAFP recommends ICE work with physicians and other stakeholders to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to improve vaccination rates for detainees. As a first step to increase vaccine confidence and stem refusal rates, ICE should work with community-based physicians and provide information that is culturally and linguistically appropriate to answer individuals' questions about COVID-19 vaccines and address concerns related to vaccination.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Should you have any questions, please contact John Aguilar, Manager of Legislative Affairs, at jaguilar@aafp.org.

STRONG MEDICINE FOR AMERICA

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Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Gary L. LeRoy, MD, FAAFP in black ink.

Gary L. LeRoy, MD, FAAFP
Board Chair
American Academy of Family Physicians

¹ Montoya-Galvez, C. (2021, August 13). *ICE ramps up vaccination of immigrants in U.S. custody, but thousands have refused*. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ice-ramps-up-vaccination-of-immigrants-in-u-s-custody-but-thousands-have-refused/>.

² Ibid.

³ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (2021, August 18). *ICE guidance on COVID-19*. <https://www.ice.gov/coronavirus#detStat>.