

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

May 4, 2012

Dr. Thomas Frieden,  
Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Dr. Frieden,

Thank you for your assistance to Washington State as Washington Department of Health officials address the Pertussis (the “Whooping Cough”) epidemic. As you know, Washington State has experienced an unprecedented outbreak of Whooping Cough this year. Since January, more than 1,000 cases have been reported in Washington, more than the total number of cases for all of 2011. On April 3, 2012, Washington State Secretary of Health Mary Selecky declared a Whooping Cough outbreak in the state. I write to respectfully request the CDC’s continued assistance to Washington during this epidemic, specifically by providing Epidemic Aid (“Epi Aid”), which will help state health officials to continue efforts to stem this outbreak.

As you know, this epidemic is highly contagious. The rate and number of infections could grow very quickly. For this reason, and given the severity of Whooping Cough, especially for infants, I urge you to make fighting this epidemic a top priority for the CDC and continue responding to the state’s requests for assistance without delay. Specifically, I ask for the CDC’s assistance through Epi Aid. Epi Aid will include a thorough investigation, which will provide valuable information on the root cause of the outbreak, risk factors, and other data that will give public health officials and providers additional information and identify best practices to help ensure public health and safety.

Since the outbreak, the Washington State Department of Health and local public health districts have done an incredible job to educate the public about the dangers of Whooping Cough and prevent its spread. The DOH has recommended a series of DTap vaccines for children under age 7, and a booster for those aged 11 and older called Tdap. Particularly, the DOH has warned about the potential for unvaccinated teens and adults to transmit Whooping Cough to babies (younger than 12 months). The DOH is requesting CDC assistance through Epi Aid to provide public health providers and officials with data to identify risk factors and contain the outbreak.

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In 2011, Chelsey Charles, a Snohomish County mom, lost her 27-day old infant, Kaliah, to the Whooping Cough. Ms. Charles has spoken out, working with Secretary Selecky in radio ads to urge adults to get vaccinated to protect infants. As you know, infants cannot be vaccinated until they are at least 2 months old, so they are particularly vulnerable to contracting Whooping Cough and can experience pneumonia, seizures, and an inability to breathe, as a result of contracting the illness.

To help prevent this and other tragedies, coordinated state and federal assistance is essential. Thank you for the CDC's support and for your ongoing support through federal resources, expertise, and outreach to assist Washington in addressing and containing this epidemic. Swift response is critical to stem this outbreak in the state and the coordination of state, local, and federal resources and efforts will help to ensure the health and safety of Washington residents.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell  
U.S. Senator