

January 12, 2022

Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Meta Platforms, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

Last month, the Tech Transparency Project (TTP) published the results of an investigation which found that drug dealers openly operate on Instagram and sell illicit substances that are easily accessible to teenagers as young as 13 years old.¹ Not only does Instagram allow teenagers to easily search for Xanax, Adderall, ecstasy, and a variety of prescription opioids, some of which are laced with fentanyl, but the report also finds that the “platform’s algorithms helped the underage accounts connect directly with drug dealers” and “started recommending other accounts selling drugs.”

The findings of the report are horrifying, especially as our nation confronts a drug overdose epidemic of historic proportions and an alarming deterioration of teenagers’ mental health precipitated by the coronavirus pandemic and misguided mitigation measures to it. According to provisional data from the National Center for Health Statistics released in November, more than 100,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in the 12-month period between May 2020 and April 2021—a record high and a 30 percent increase over the previous year.² Meanwhile, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts were 51 percent higher for adolescent girls in early 2021 compared to the same time period in early 2019.³

It is unconscionable that any company would aid and abet this epidemic of death and despair. Unfortunately, given Instagram’s blatant disregard for the mental health of its young users, the findings from TPP’s investigation are not shocking.⁴ The findings further demonstrate the need to pass legislation to hold social media companies like Instagram accountable for the harm it inflicts on young Americans, as I have proposed.⁵ In the meantime, American parents deserve to know the steps your company is taking to ensure that their children do not have access to illicit drugs.

¹ <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/xanax-ecstasy-and-opioids-instagram-offers-drug-pipeline-kids>

² https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2021/20211117.htm

³ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7024e1.htm?s_cid=mm7024e1_w

⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739>

⁵ <https://www.hawley.senate.gov/hawley-bill-allow-parents-sue-big-tech-harm-children>

Please respond to the following questions by January 31, 2022:

1. Instagram's Community Guidelines state that the "buying or selling non-medical or pharmaceutical drugs are...not allowed."⁶ What steps has Instagram taken to prevent the sale of illicit and prescription drugs on your platform?
2. What protocols does Instagram have for the removal of accounts selling drugs? How many accounts have been removed for violations?
3. Does Instagram currently partner with law enforcement when dealing with accounts selling drugs? If so, what does this partnership entail? If not, does your company plan to begin doing so?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Josh Hawley
United States Senator

⁶ <https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119>