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July 19, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

I write to you to express serious concerns regarding the federal response to the spread of the monkeypox virus in the United States. As you know, early epidemiological data demonstrates that the virus disproportionately impacts members of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly bisexual and gay men. But the federal government is falling short of the response that is needed. The United States must apply the costly, devastating lessons learned throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and the AIDS epidemic to ensure a comprehensive, evidence-based federal response to the monkeypox virus.

To that end, I strongly urge the Biden Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to build on its efforts to combat the spread of the monkeypox virus by increasing the manufacturing and distribution of vaccines, supporting provider education and community outreach, and developing and implementing a long-term strategy to combat the spread of the monkeypox virus for years to come.

The demand for monkeypox vaccinations across the country far outweighs supply, with members of at-risk communities reportedly being turned away at vaccination sites due to limited supply.¹ Public health experts estimate that confirmed cases reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) vastly underrepresents the true number of cases due to limited access to testing.² I am deeply concerned that the approximately 7 million doses of the JYNNEOS vaccine acquired by the United States will not meet the sky-rocketing demand. The current supply of the two-dose vaccine regimen accounts for only 3.5 million residents in the United States. With some shipments of the vaccine not expected to arrive until well into 2023, the current federal vaccination strategy falls short in terms of supply and timeliness. I urge HHS, in coordination with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Biomedical Advanced Research and

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/07/13/monkeypox-vaccine-800000-doses/?utm_campaign=KHN%3A%20First%20Edition&utm_medium=email&hsmi=219615296&hsenc=p2ANqtz-OREQRUIpFSZQwHJhuAd1EiWX1Q1k9bz8w-fswAlBjKMqMj83uJyyWHdLdPbpiqNZaiWswMz0llv4632QVCx8ChCV7Pg&utm_content=219615296&utm_source=hs_email

² <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/06/25/1107416457/monkeypox-outbreak-in-us>

Development Authority (BARDA), to draw upon lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic and use the full power of the executive branch to increase manufacturing and distribution of the JYNNEOS vaccine across the country as quickly as possible.

To ensure patients with monkeypox receive proper and timely diagnoses and treatments – and importantly, limit the spread of the virus – the federal government must equip health care providers with the tools and resources they need now, not after the virus spreads more. This includes educating doctors, nurses, and public health officials about the signs and symptoms of monkeypox and how to access testing, vaccinations, and treatments for patients who need it. Concerning reports have surfaced of patients with monkeypox being misdiagnosed multiple times before finally receiving a monkeypox diagnosis – despite experiencing multiple symptoms of the virus indicated by CDC.³ HHS, in coordination with CDC and state and local governments, must be proactive in their outreach to educate providers and community leaders about the monkeypox virus. Rapid, comprehensive, and continuing education efforts will not only limit the spread of the virus but help combat the stigmatization of the virus.

Finally, I strongly encourage HHS to develop and implement a comprehensive, long-term strategy to combat the spread of the monkeypox virus in the United States. Sky-rocketing cases and limited vaccination supply world-wide suggests that the monkeypox virus will continue to spread for years to come, if not indefinitely. The HIV crisis and Covid-19 pandemic have demonstrated it is critical that public health officials be forward-thinking in combatting the spread of viral infections – particularly in instances when marginalized communities, such as the LGBTQ+ community, are hardest-hit. It is imperative that HHS consider, develop, and implement a public health strategy that will ensure access to monkeypox testing, vaccination, treatment, and provider education for years to come.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam B. Schiff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adam" and last name "Schiff" being the most legible parts. It is positioned above a horizontal line.

Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress

³ <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/06/25/1107416457/monkeypox-outbreak-in-us>