

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 8, 2022

The Honorable Dawn O’Connell
Asst. Secretary for Preparedness & Response
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Dr. Rochelle Walensky
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, Georgia 30329

Dear Assistant Secretary O’Connell and Director Walensky,

We write to express concerns about the increasing number of monkeypox virus (MPV) cases in the United States and across the world. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are 8,934 cases confirmed in the United States¹, with more cases expected as testing increases. Our response to COVID-19 highlighted the importance of clear and early communication from public health experts. It’s imperative that we apply this lesson to improve MPV awareness and education among the general public and health care providers.

Many health care providers lack familiarity in identifying, testing for, and treating MPV infections.² In some cases, this lack of familiarity has resulted in patients seeing multiple health care professionals in order to be tested, even when they have had known exposures to MPV.³ Additionally, we have heard from patients who have never been formally diagnosed with MPV, but have had lesions removed. The lack of proper diagnosis and improper treatment has led to an increased infection risk for those patients and increased spread of MPV within their families and providers. This is extremely disturbing, and highlights that providers may need additional educational resources in order to effectively care for patients.

We must ensure that the general public also has the most accurate and up to date information about how to stop the spread of MPV. Overemphasis on spread of MPV within a single population group can dangerously stigmatize that group, and simultaneously reduce the accurate diagnosis and treatment of MPV outside of that group. The reality is that MPV can spread among any population. Primarily spread through direct contact with lesions, it can also spread through shared objects, such as sheets, towels, soiled clothing, and bathmats,⁴ and transmitted through respiratory secretions in extended periods of close contact.⁵ It is crucial that the general public has accurate, clear, and accessible information about stopping the spread of MPV in order to protect their health and the health of their loved ones.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/response/2022/us-map.html>

² <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/monkeypox-numbers-treatment-and-prevention-two-cdc-experts>

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/06/23/monkeypox-response-biden-administration/>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/16/nyregion/monkeypox-new-york.html>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/transmission.html>

In order to better understand the agencies' efforts to stop the spread of MPV in the United States, we request responses to the following questions and a briefing with you and your staff to better understand your efforts to educate the health care providers and the public about MPV:

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the novel nature of the virus created communication challenges and made it difficult for many people to understand how to take appropriate precautions. What are you doing to ensure that the general public has the information they need to protect themselves from MPV infection?
2. What are you doing to inform health care providers, including through educational institutions and medical associations, about MPV to ensure that providers are aware of the signs and symptoms of the virus, and how to request tests and treatment?
3. What action is the federal government taking to ensure the MPV outbreak does not become a pandemic?

Thank you for your continued commitment to the health and safety of all Americans. We look forward to your response and working with you to ensure we are providing the best possible resources for providers and the general public to fight MPV.

Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



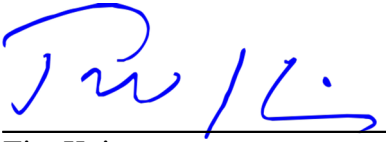
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



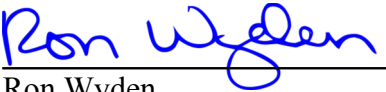
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