

July 20, 2022

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

Dear Director Walensky,

On behalf of the undersigned LGBTQ+ organizations, we are writing today as our community faces the health threat of Monkeypox (hMPXV) to demand expanding testing, vaccine access, and a name change for hMPXV.

As of July 19, 2022, there have been 1,972^[1] hMPXV cases confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) across the United States. California has 267^[2] confirmed cases, the second highest number of confirmed hMPXV cases in the country. While public health departments are still investigating transmissions, both the World Health Organization^{[3],[4]} and the CDC^[5] have expressed concern that a significant majority of confirmed transmissions have been between transgender women, gay and bisexual men, as well as men who have sex with men (MSM), including in Los Angeles County and San Francisco. As of July 15, 2022, San Francisco had 86^[6] known cases and Los Angeles County reported 109^[7] known cases. Given a number of factors — including difficulty accessing testing and lack of awareness from both patients and providers about hMPVX — these numbers are likely a vast underestimate of the true number of hMPXV cases.

While we are encouraged to see the Biden-Harris Administration take stronger action to contain the hMPXV outbreak and protect those who are most at risk, the following are needed to mitigate the disproportionate impact that this poxvirus has on MSM and transgender communities:

- **Expand Testing:** While the CDC has recently begun shipping hMPXV tests to five of the largest commercial labs across the country, increasing patient access and convenience is critical. County public health agencies and the community-based organizations they partner with are in desperate need of sufficient testing for all those at risk of contracting hMPXV.

¹ Centers For Disease Control. 2022 U.S. Map & Case Count.

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

² Ibid

³ World Health Organization. Monkeypox: Public Health Advice for Gay, Bisexual and other Men Who Have Sex With Men. May 25, 2022.

<https://www.who.int/news/item/25-05-2022-monkeypox--public-health-advice-for-gay--bisexual-and-other-men-who-have-sex-with-men>

⁴ World Health Organization. Multi-Country Monkeypox Outbreak: Situation Update. June 27, 2022.

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2022-DON396>

⁵ Centers for Disease Control. U.S. Monkeypox Outbreak 2022: Situation Summary.

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Health-Advisory-Monkeypox-Virus-6-23-22.aspx>

⁶ City and County of San Francisco. <https://sf.gov/information/monkeypox-cases>

⁷ Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/monkeypox/>

- **Expand Vaccine Access:** To date, the CDC has only provided vaccines to those with confirmed hMPXV exposures, resulting in limited vaccine allotments. While the new national vaccine strategy will expand access to vaccines for individuals at higher risk of exposure, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services must take immediate steps to allocate sufficient vaccine doses across the country and prioritize jurisdictions with the highest number of cases and populations at greatest risk. California is poised to become the epicenter of confirmed cases with Los Angeles County having 109 and San Francisco having 86 of the total 266 confirmed cases.
- **Change the Name:** The undersigned organizations also request an immediate change to the name of this poxvirus, and support the World Health Organization's intention to rename Monkeypox to "hMPXV^[8]" amidst international public calls by medical professionals and scientists. The current global strain has no clear link to West Africa where the virus typically originates, and it acts differently than the West Africa strain. Additionally, the current nomenclature and association to West Africa are stigmatizing and could lead to discrimination. As decades long leaders in the fight against HIV/AIDS, the undersigned organizations strive to create an environment where diseases do not discriminate against populations and are concerned the current name undermines decades of efforts to minimize stigma in MSM communities.

The undersigned organizations have always and will always stand on the front lines battling for the safety and wellbeing of all our community. Since the first days of the AIDS epidemic, through COVID-19, and now in preparation for hMPXV, we will be ready. We look forward to continued collaboration with CDC and our local health departments in the coming days and weeks as testing and vaccination services ramp up. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Cc Xavier Becerra

Equality California
Los Angeles LGBT Center
National Center for Lesbian Rights
San Francisco AIDS Foundation

⁸ Chappell, Bill. NPR. June 15, 2022. The WHO wants to give Monkeypox a new name.
<https://www.npr.org/2022/06/15/1105188732/monkeypox-new-name-who-world-health>