

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Joins colleagues sounding alarm on monkeypox outbreak, highlighting inequities of vaccine access

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Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) joined a group of 22 Senators led by Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) in a letter to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urging the agencies to acknowledge inequities of vaccine access and immediately increase access to the JYNNEOS monkeypox and smallpox vaccine to all communities in the United States.

“The United States has invested billions of dollars to develop, manufacture, and stockpile doses of the JYNNEOS vaccine as a component of a federal biosecurity program,” wrote the Senators. “We understand that this vaccine is the current preferred option for monkeypox vaccination given its approval by the FDA, ease of administration, and general tolerability.”

In their letter the Senators bring to light that across the country, state, local, and health officials are reporting the limited vaccine supplies are failing to keep pace with the increasing number of people seeking appointments. The lack of available vaccine appointments continues to fuel anxiety about a virus that is generally unfamiliar to Americans, who are urgently looking for solutions—especially those who identify with the LGBTQ+ community.

“Monkeypox is spread through direct contact and can infect anyone. Yet health care

services are too often inaccessible or otherwise denied to members of at-risk communities, particularly the LGBTQ+ community,” they continued. “It is critical for vaccine access to be equitable, even in the face of high demand. Indeed, demand is so high for vaccination that appointment slots made available by public health agencies have been filled nearly instantly, and some sites have even crashed due to high traffic from our constituents.”

Since there is currently more demand than supply for the monkeypox vaccine, the Senators urge the Departments to work with urgency to take the necessary steps and action to respond to this public health concern fairly and efficiently among all communities—ensuring adequate doses, and equitable distribution of the vaccine in the United States.

Joining Senators Baldwin and Merkley in the letter are Senators Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Gary Peters (D-MI), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Jack Reed (D-RI), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Angus King (I-ME), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN).

Full text of the letter can be found [here](#) and follows below.

An online version of this release is available [here](#).

Dear Assistant Secretary O’Connell and Dr. Walensky:

We write to express concern about the increasing number of monkeypox cases in the United States, and to urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to apply an interagency approach to address this outbreak, including by increasing access to the JYNNEOS monkeypox and smallpox vaccine in the United States.

The United States has invested billions of dollars to develop, manufacture, and stockpile doses of the JYNNEOS vaccine as a component of a federal biosecurity program. We understand that this vaccine is the current preferred option for monkeypox vaccination given its approval by the FDA, ease of administration, and general tolerability.

However, across the country, state and local and health officials have reported that the limited vaccine supplies are not keeping pace with the growing number of people seeking appointments¹, a gap that continues to fuel anxiety about a virus that is generally unfamiliar to Americans, who are urgently looking for solutions.

Monkeypox is spread through direct contact and can infect anyone. Yet health care services are too often inaccessible or otherwise denied to members of at-risk communities, particularly the LGBTQ+ community. It is critical for vaccine access to be equitable, even in the face of high demand. Indeed, demand is so high for vaccination that appointment slots made available by public health agencies have been filled nearly instantly², and some sites have even crashed due to high traffic from our constituents³.

In light of this high demand and the communities that have been impacted by the outbreak in the United States to date, we implore you to work with urgency to take the necessary action to respond to this public health concern and ensure adequate doses and equitable distribution of the vaccine in the United States. We look forward to your response and continued partnership in addressing this public health concern.