

U.S. Sen. Baldwin, U.S. Reps Moore, Pocan, and Kind: Request resources for Wisconsin to respond to Monkeypox crisis

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Wisconsin Democratic delegation highlighted the disproportionate impact on the LGBTQ+ community and need to reduce stigmatization

WISCONSIN – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Representatives Gwen Moore (D-WI-04), Mark Pocan (D-WI-02), and Ron Kind (D-WI-03) requested that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) provide additional resources for the state of Wisconsin to respond to the monkeypox outbreak, including vaccines. With the virus disproportionately impacting members of the LGBTQ+ community, the Wisconsin Democratic delegation urged HHS and CDC to work with stakeholders and members of the LGBTQ+ community to reduce stigmatization and misinformation.

“Although the risk of widespread transmission remains low, it is essential that we have supplies on hand to both prevent new cases and provide care for those who contract this virus,” **said the members of Congress.** “Unfortunately, nationwide, access to testing remains a challenge, which has prevented us from having a full understanding of the reach and spread of this virus. This is unacceptable. It is imperative that the Administration act without delay to remove barriers to testing to help us better understand how monkeypox is spreading nationally.”

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

Dear Secretary Becerra, Director Walensky, and Assistant Secretary O'Connell,

Following the declaration of a public health emergency for monkeypox on August 4 by Secretary Becerra, we write to request additional resources for the state of Wisconsin, including additional vaccine doses. Further, we request that the Administration continue to prioritize outreach and public education, conducted in close collaboration with the LGBTQ+ community to prevent stigmatization.

As of August 11, 2022, the state of Wisconsin had identified 38 cases of orthopoxvirus, presumed to be monkeypox. Although the risk of widespread transmission remains low, it is essential that we have supplies on hand to both prevent new cases and provide care for those who contract this virus. Unfortunately, nationwide, access to testing remains a challenge, which has prevented us from having a full understanding of the reach and spread of this virus. This is unacceptable. It is imperative that the Administration act without delay to remove barriers to testing to help us better understand how monkeypox is spreading nationally.

In addition, we must capitalize on the availability of a vaccine. Unlike COVID-19, we already have an FDA-licensed vaccine indicated for prevention of smallpox and monkeypox that can also serve as a post-exposure prophylactic. Further, the state of Wisconsin has been able to effectively utilize the "hub and spoke" model for COVID-19 vaccine distribution to make monkeypox vaccines available to those at high risk. Demand for the vaccine, however, far outpaces the state's allotment. We are concerned by the reported missteps that have contributed to delays in making distributions to states and jurisdictions, resulting in limited access to vaccine doses. Although we support efforts to extend vaccine availability, more clinical research is needed to ensure the safety of the new intradermal vaccine protocol, and more communication and training must be done to ensure that vaccines are administered safely. State officials and vaccinators need more information about this update, as well as reliable information regarding when and how many additional doses of vaccine will be allocated. Further, there needs to be more public education to mitigate apprehension regarding this method of administration, and to provide information regarding safety and effectiveness. As of August 12, 2022, the state of Wisconsin had been allocated enough vaccine doses for less than 3,400 residents. This is a fraction of the state's demand. We need more doses, and we need HHS to exercise all available authorities to make sure that individuals at increased risk are protected.

Finally, it is essential that the Administration's response to the outbreak of monkeypox be informed by stakeholders and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Although monkeypox can infect anyone, the virus has had a disproportionate impact on men who have sex with men (MSM). Numerous reports indicate that individuals have faced significant obstacles in accessing testing and treatment, and a recent CNN investigation revealed that large commercial laboratories were denying drawing blood from patients who might have the virus. As you know, health care services are too often inaccessible for members of at-risk communities, and these reports are all too reminiscent of the nation's initial response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We must address this crisis, and those at the highest levels of government must make clear that stigma and misinformation will only allow the virus to spread further.

Sincerely,