



LINA HIDALGO Mayor Sylvester Turner

July 26, 2022

Director Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPH
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
4770 Buford Highway NE
Atlanta, Georgia 30341

RE: Request for Additional Monkeypox Vaccines in Houston and Harris County

Dear Director Walensky,

We are writing on behalf of Harris County, the City of Houston, and the Harris Health System to request that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) increase monkeypox vaccine allocations to our region and provide additional resources to support response and mitigation efforts by our local health departments.

As the nation's third largest County and fourth largest City with a total population of nearly 5 million, our combined allocation of vaccine from the state most recently stands at 5,324 doses with 3,726 allocated to Houston and 1,598 to Harris County (outside the City of Houston). In recent weeks we have seen large increases in other large urban centers, including New York City and major cities in California. We hope to avoid a similarly large outbreak in our region and make our appeal proactively.

We are grateful for the allocation of vaccines we have received to date; however, we are deeply concerned that the current amount allocated and received will be insufficient to respond to the increase in the number of cases we have seen in Houston and Harris County in recent weeks and the trajectory we are observing elsewhere in the nation.

As with any increase of Monkeypox cases, there is a subsequent increase in contacts. Currently we are averaging 2.3 contacts per case in the City of Houston and 3.2 contacts per case in Harris County. **We also foresee a need to ramp up our operations to test and vaccinate more individuals in our community. Our ability to do that will be limited without more funding.** We know from experience, particularly with COVID-19, that our underserved population do not have access to services based on cost (lack of insurance) and/or live far from lab locations. Houston Health Department's Laboratory Response Network (LRN) is capable of testing up to 50 specimens per day. In terms of vaccinations, we urgently need more vaccines for both the insured and uninsured.

Over the past week (July 16th to 22nd), the monkeypox infection rate has increased 60% in Harris County and Houston. At this rate, and this is assuming a constant rate of increase, our region will have approximately 770 cases in six weeks, with multiple contacts meeting vaccine criteria. We are closely watching what is taking place across the nation. **We are eager and ready to vaccinate at-risk populations before the virus spreads exponentially, rather than wait for exponential growth and then catch up like other jurisdictions have had to do. We have an opportunity to truly mitigate this virus, but the only way for us to seize this opportunity is through robust testing and vaccines.**

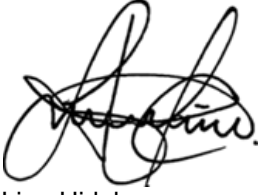
We have seen from other jurisdictions that they started with limited vaccines on close contacts and, once cases had gotten out of hand, they are now struggling to meet the demand. We are ready to deploy our local response to address the immediate need among populations at the highest risk, including men who have sex with men (MSM) who are disproportionately at risk at this time.

In order to do this, we are requesting at least 5,000 vaccines now and consistent larger shipments going forward after receiving the initial doses, so that we can begin offering the vaccine to at-risk populations. This request for additional vaccines would also cover expanded groups along with the current disproportionate need in the MSM population. We also request emergency funding for testing and other resources for appropriate response.

As a starting point we need 5,000 additional doses – at minimum – just to vaccinate close contacts over the next few weeks. That, however, would not be enough to reach all identified at-risk populations.

We look forward to your response regarding this concerning matter for our region.

Thank you,



Lina Hidalgo
Harris County Judge



Sylvester Turner
Houston Mayor

[CC Harris County and Houston Delegation]