



RAUL RUIZ, M.D.
Member of Congress
36th District of California

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July 21, 2022

Dr. Mark Ghaly
Secretary, Health & Human Services Agency
1215 O Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Dr. Ghaly,

I write to request the direct provision of the monkeypox vaccine for the City of Palm Springs and the surrounding region. As a popular tourist destination, especially for LGBTQ+ Americans, the Palm Springs area is at extremely high risk for monkeypox contraction and requires a specialized focus in order to mitigate potential dangers.

I understand that our nation is facing an overall shortage of the monkeypox vaccine. As cases multiply, we are racing to provide enough doses to vaccinate our highest-risk populations. However, vaccine priority is being given to cities like San Francisco and San Diego, based on measurements such as population density and positivity rate. This causes high-risk but low-density cities like Palm Springs to be overlooked for vaccine provision. Current state allocations offer around 1,000 doses to Riverside County as a whole, which could only vaccinate around 500 people county-wide, and even less so in the Palm Springs area. However, local infectious disease experts say that they would need 10,000 vaccines to cover the area's high-risk populations.

While major cities in California have vaccinated their highest-risk citizens and begun vaccinating broader groups, Palm Springs remains unable to vaccinate even those at highest-risk. This poses an extreme health risk, especially as the region holds a disproportionately high immunocompromised population — largely due to an HIV-positivity rate that is over twice as high as LA County. Further, the Palm Springs region is set to host several tourist events and large gatherings in the coming months. These events will undoubtedly increase the spread of monkeypox, yet total case positivity in the region will remain lower than major cities, as many tourists will likely travel back home before testing positive. If California's vaccine distribution strategy continues to overlook the Palm Springs area, monkeypox will spread at even higher rates and endanger more populations nationwide.

Similar low-density cities that present a high risk for monkeypox spread include Fire Island in New York and Provincetown in Massachusetts, two popular tourist destinations that see large numbers of LGBTQ+ travelers over the summer. These cities have received specialized focus from their respective states and counties, and each now hosts vaccine clinics. I urge the state of California to take on the same strategy for Palm Springs and the surrounding region.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to our shared work in addressing this outbreak.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raul Ruiz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent flourish at the end.

Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress

CC: Governor of California Gavin Newsom