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Advocating for Additional Federal Assistance for Monkeypox Response

Beginning in May 2022, multiple cases of monkeypox were identified in several countries where the virus is not normally reported, including the United States. As of July 19, 2022, 2,108 cases have been confirmed across the United States, including 267 in California. 120 cases have been confirmed in Los Angeles County, a number of which have been contributed to local community spread and not associated with any travel exposure.

Among recent cases, sustained skin-to-skin contact, including sexual contact, with a symptomatic person with monkeypox has been the most significant risk factor associated with transmission. However, monkeypox has also been known to spread through contact with lesions on a person’s skin, touching contaminated objects, fabrics, and surfaces that have been in contact with someone with monkeypox, or coming into contact with respiratory droplets from or secretions from the eyes, nose, and mouth from a person with monkeypox. In this outbreak, many of the cases have been reported

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among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM). However, anyone, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, can acquire and spread monkeypox.

Fortunately, there is testing available through public and private health care providers and public and commercial laboratories. There is also prophylaxis for monkeypox available in the form of the JYNNEOS vaccine. However, due to the increased spread across the country supplies of this vaccine remain limited, including in Los Angeles County. Furthermore, federal medical reimbursement rates for providers to support testing and vaccine administration is inadequate and places an undue share of the burden on those healthcare providers who are willing to partner in the response effort. Los Angeles County has received 7,400 JYNNEOS vaccine, 5,400 of which have been distributed and administered to date. In addition to that, community partners have received over 2,000 doses and are reaching out to their vaccine-eligible patient population to come in for vaccination.

Additional supplies have allowed the Department of Public Health (Public Health) to expand eligible populations as of July 18 to gay and bisexual men and transgender residents who have been diagnosed with gonorrhea or early syphilis within the past 12 months, are on HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), or attended or worked at a commercial sex venue where they had anonymous sex or sex with multiple partners. This is in addition to the existing eligibility of residents confirmed by Public Health to have high- or intermediate-risk contact with a confirmed monkeypox case or attended an event or venue where there was high risk of exposure with a confirmed monkeypox case through skin-to-skin or sexual contact.

Los Angeles County recently received another 9,800 doses, with another 7,000

expected before the end of the week of July 18. Beyond that, the status of further allocations is unclear. With the current supply, it is estimated that only 5-10% of the population that wants to be vaccinated will be reached. Given the vaccine can be administered both pre- and post-exposure and the continued spread of the monkeypox virus throughout Los Angeles County, additional vaccine supplies will be needed to expand vaccine eligibility to both prevent further spread and to provide an effective treatment to those who have been exposed. In the absence of additional supplies of the JYNNEOS vaccine, it is imperative that there is a coordinated local strategy to provide outreach and education regarding the prevention of the spread of monkeypox.

Furthermore, Public Health, has received reports from the community provider network that reimbursement rates for administering monkeypox testing, vaccination and treatment are inconsistent and unsustainably low to support their efforts. In addition, providers remain concerned about their ability to serve the uninsured population without designated funding for these services.

WE THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office (CEO) Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Branch to send a five-signature letter to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky requesting 1) additional supplies of the JYNNEOS vaccine be sent to Los Angeles County, and to take whatever measures are possible, including working with President Joseph R. Biden to invoke the Defense Production Act to increase the supply and manufacturing of the JYNNEOS vaccine; 2) that standard billing codes and sustainable reimbursement levels be established for monkeypox

testing, vaccine administration, and treatment; and 3) that a funding source be secured to reimburse monkeypox testing, vaccine administration, and treatment services provided by clinics, hospitals, and other healthcare providers caring for uninsured residents.

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