

Written by Kathy
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Pictured are Democratic U.S. Representatives Shontel M. Brown of Ohio (OH-11), Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. of Georgia (GA-4) (wearing purple tie), and Ritchie Torres of New York (NY-15) All three of them represent largely Black congressional districts in Congress.

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By Kathy Wray Coleman, associate publisher, editor-in-chief (Coleman is a former biology teacher and a seasoned Black journalist, and an investigative, legal, scientific and political reporter who trained for 17 years at the Call and Post Newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio).

Monkeypox vaccine disparities: Democratic U.S. Reps Shontel Brown of Ohio, Hank Johnson, and Ritchie Torres

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Democratic U.S. Reps. Shontel M. Brown of Ohio (OH-11), Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr. of Georgia (GA-4), and Ritchie Torres of New York (NY-15) on Tuesday led a group of 23 largely Democratic members of Congress in urging the Biden administration to strengthen efforts to address inequities in the nation's public healthcare system as it relates to the monkeypox vaccine and disenfranchised groups that they say are being denied equal access to the vaccine.

To prevent and reduce the spread of infectious diseases, Reps. Brown, Johnson, and Torres, Brown and Johnson of whom are Black, and Torres, an Afro-Latino, penned a letter requesting that the Biden administration ensure the fair distribution of monkeypox vaccines, testing, and therapeutics among at-risk groups that have been historically disadvantaged, including Blacks, Latinos, poor people, and the LGBTQ community.

The letter, which, in addition to Brown, Johnson and Torres, is also signed by 20 other House members, can be viewed by clicking [here](#). The other 20 House members who signed on to the letter include Congresswomen Eleanor Holmes Norton, Marcy Kaptur of Toledo, Debbie Dingell, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib.

Dated Aug 16, the letter was sent to National Monkeypox Response Coordinator Robert J. Fenton Jr. and specifically called for the Biden administration to expand its response efforts to target low-income individuals, those without access to internet and transportation, and other economic disparities. Additionally, the letter emphasized concern for the MSM and LGBTQ+ communities that have been hit hardest by monkeypox, and in a disproportionate fashion.

"The prevalence of highly infectious diseases like monkeypox and COVID-19 has been felt across the nation, but they have wreaked havoc disproportionately on minority communities that often lack access to basic healthcare resources like vaccines," said Rep. Brown, a member of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform and a Warrensville Hts Democrat whose largely Black 11th congressional district includes Cleveland and several of its eastern suburbs of Cuyahoga County. "These inequities within our healthcare system are deeply rooted and have been documented for decades, and it is past time that we work to address them."

Congressman Johnson, a Democrat representing Georgia's majority Black fourth congressional district, which includes several of the city of Atlanta's inner eastern suburbs, agreed.

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“In Georgia, monkeypox is infecting an overwhelming number of Black people compared to other races, particularly Black men,” said Rep. Johnson, a six-term congressman. “Nationwide, despite Black and Hispanic people making up about one-third of the population over half of the reported cases are within these groups. I am happy to work with Congresswoman Brown and Congressman Torres to avoid a worst-case scenario for this critical health emergency.”

Congressman Torres, whose largely Black 15th congressional district includes most of New York City's South Bronx, joined Reps Brown and Johnson in demanding equity and fairness for marginalized groups such as Blacks, Latinos and the LGBTQ community regarding inadequate access to the monkeypox vaccine.

“The U.S. has a long and ugly history of ignoring the public health needs of the LGBTQ community.” said Congressman Torres, 34 and one of the younger members of Congress. “It is imperative that the federal response is equitable and does not leave at risk communities behind when it comes to testing and vaccinations.”

The White House announced on Thursday that it would be upping its supply of monkeypox vaccine doses by 1.8 million beginning this week with U.S Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra calling it a “critical priority.” Some 5.5 million vials of JYNNEOS monkeypox vaccine were initially slated for distribution but President Joe Biden, following criticism from congressional and senate Democrats from his own party, increased the supply.

A Democrat and the vice president under former president Barack Obama, the country's first Black president, Biden took office as president in January of 2021 after defeating then president Donald Trump, a Republican, in a heated election in November of 2020. He campaigned in 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic was at its peak and promised then to tame it if elected president. Since then several variants and sub-variants of the coronavirus have emerged countrywide and internationally, though monkeypox, which is a virus but not a coronavirus, is not as contagious, and certainly is not as deadly.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), monkeypox, an infectious disease caused by the monkeypox virus and transmitted primarily via infected bodily fluids, is closely related

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to the virus that causes smallpox, namely the variola virus.

The smallpox vaccine, however, can also be used as a vaccine for monkeypox, CDC officials say. There are more than 43,000 hospitalizations and some 14,000 registered cases of monkeypox nationwide with the states of Texas and Florida leading all other states in cases, both of those states with roughly 1,200 cases.

The CDC has deemed the virus and its impact nationally, and internationally, a public health emergency. In late July, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) urged men who have sex with men to be aware of the risk of exposure.

The first documentation by the federal government of the monkeypox disease in 2022 in the U.S. was in May of this year in Boston, Massachusetts. Currently, the disease has been reported in some 87 countries and there are over 23,000 reported cases worldwide. Ohio has reported some 123 cases of the contagious virus for which, like all other viruses including the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS, and the herpes simplex virus, which causes the sexually transmitted disease genital herpes, there is no known cure.

Unlike the coronavirus where nearly a million people have died in the U.S. since the pandemic first hit in March of 2020 and some six and half million people have lost their lives worldwide, dying from monkeypox is a rarity. So far there have been no reported monkeypox deaths in the U.S., and only five deaths from the virus have been documented worldwide. Of those five deaths, Spain, in Europe, has seen two death, and India, in Asia, one death, while Ecuador and Brazil, both in South America, have both reported one death. This is according to a global data map from the CDC.

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We interviewed former president Barack Obama one-on-one when he was campaigning for president. As to the Obama interview,

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