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U.S. JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

July 30, 2021

Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

Thank you for your efforts to help communities respond to the pandemic. Today, I write to express my concern for the millions of people in the U.S. with a transplanted organ or compromised immune system, who are not mounting the same antibody response post-vaccination.

Individuals with solid organ transplants must maintain a lifelong regimen of strong daily doses of immunosuppressive drugs to keep their bodies from rejecting their new organ. Research suggests that many transplant recipients may not receive protection from vaccination, even after two doses.¹ A study found that 46% of transplant patients have had no evidence of an antibody response to the vaccine after two doses. Of the 54% who developed antibodies, their levels were generally lower than those with non-compromised immune systems. This has led to increased uncertainty for transplant patients and put them at continued risk of catching Covid-19.

Research has shown that a third dose of the mRNA vaccine could give those with weakened immune systems more protection.² France and Israel have moved forward to allow immunocompromised individuals to access a 3rd dose of the vaccine, while the United Kingdom is considering a similar measure.³ Further, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) at the CDC expressed preliminary support for giving Covid-19 boosters to immunocompromised individuals.⁴ I urge HHS to work to expedite the provision of a third dose for immunocompromised and immunosuppressed individuals without sacrificing safety.

Additionally, I ask HHS to move swiftly to provide options for this population, as research has shown that immunocompromised individuals can have prolonged infections, which provide conditions for variants to emerge.⁵

¹ John Hopkins Medicine, [“Organ Transplant Recipients Remain Vulnerable to COVID-19 Even After Second Vaccine Dose.”](#)

² The New England Journal of Medicine, [“Three Doses of an mRNA Covid-19 Vaccine in Solid-Organ Transplant Recipients.”](#) June 23, 2021 & Annals of Internal Medicine, [“Safety and Immunogenicity of a Third Dose of SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine in Solid Organ Transplant Recipients: A Case Series.”](#) June 15, 2021

³ Wall Street Journal, [U.S. Vaccine Panel Signals Preliminary Support for Covid-19 Booster Shots](#)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Journal of the American Medical Association, [Researchers Tie Severe Immunosuppression to Chronic COVID-19 and Virus Variants](#)

Finally, I urge HHS to prioritize research to rigorously study the impact of Covid-19 on organ transplant recipients and the larger immunocompromised community, including which vaccinations methods are best for this populations (mRNA, vector vaccines, and protein subunit vaccines), as well as the combination of multiple types of vaccines. This is of increased importance for solid organ transplant recipients who in many cases have been excluded from vaccine clinical trials.⁶ Without sufficient research and prioritization, millions of Americans are left to seek out their own solutions.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter.

Sincerely,



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress

⁶ NCBI, [COVID-19 vaccination in immunocompromised patients](#).