

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Ron DeSantis
Governor

Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, PhD
State Surgeon General

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

28 December 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

Under the leadership of Governor Ron DeSantis, Florida led the way with our Seniors First vaccination initiative, providing vaccines to the state's most vulnerable population. As of December 26, 2021, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 78.2% of eligible Floridians elected to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Without the heavy hand of government mandates, Florida is above the national average in the percent of people receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

The rise of the Delta variant in Florida brought challenges requiring more than one solution to the COVID-19 pandemic. On August 12, 2021, Governor DeSantis announced a rapid increase in the availability of monoclonal antibody therapy treatments across the state. In a matter of weeks, the state had 25 monoclonal antibody sites up and running – leading the nation in widespread early COVID-19 treatment availability.

By mid-September, the State of Florida provided this life-saving treatment to nearly 100,000 patients. These sites served 5,000 patients a day at the peak and nearly 30,000 per week. Florida pioneered monoclonal antibodies as a statewide solution to prevent severe illness and reduce the strain of COVID-19 on the state's hospital systems.

Shortly after Florida's 100,000 treatment milestone, and without any advanced notice, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced a dramatic reduction in the number of monoclonal antibodies to be allocated to the State of Florida. Governor DeSantis moved quickly to acquire Sotrovimab from GlaxoSmithKline to help alleviate the artificial shortage caused by this sudden shift from HHS. However, the lack of allocation of this life-saving treatment from the federal government continues to cause another immediate and life-threatening shortage of treatment options to the State of Florida as the Omicron variant spreads throughout the state.

While administration of monoclonal antibody therapy treatments in Florida is shifting back to the private health care sector, and there is growing evidence that some treatment options may not be as effective against the Omicron variant, the federal agencies under your control should not limit our state's access to any available treatments for COVID-19. Florida can expand treatment options for patients by distributing therapeutics to providers working in areas with a low prevalence of Omicron or clinics capable of variant screening.

The federal government is actively preventing the effective distribution of monoclonal antibody treatments in the U.S. The sudden suspension of multiple monoclonal antibody therapy treatments from distribution to Florida removes a health care provider's ability to decide the best treatment options for their patients in this state. This shortsightedness is especially evident given that the federal government effectively prohibited states from purchasing these monoclonal antibodies and serving their populations directly.

Florida is a large, diverse state with one of the highest percentages of seniors in the U.S., and we must empower healthcare providers to make decisions that will save the lives of Americans everywhere without the dictates imposed by the federal government.

President Biden recently stated that there is no federal solution to COVID-19, and solving this pandemic will happen at the state level. Therefore, as Surgeon General, I respectfully request that you allow states and healthcare practitioners to provide treatment options that best benefit the communities they know and serve.

Sincerely,



Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, PhD
State Surgeon General