



October 31, 2025

Jim O'Neill
Acting Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Via e-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov; nhpimporters@cdc.gov

Dear Mr. O'Neill:

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—PETA entities have more than 10 million members and supporters globally—regarding the October 28 truck crash that released rhesus macaques from Tulane National Primate Research Center (TNPRC) into a Mississippi community. As of this writing, three monkeys remain on the loose, and there's been no documented presence of CDC officials on site.

This absence highlights a dangerous policy gap: once monkeys clear the brief 31-day import quarantine, CDC ends its oversight, leaving thousands of animals to be moved across the country without monitoring of their health or the pathogens they may carry. Imported monkeys don't just pass through the system — they consistently seed and reseed primate facilities with tuberculosis, *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, malaria, hepatitis, and herpes B, and they can also introduce novel strains or pathogens that have gone undetected during quarantine. These new threats are layered on top of pathogens already entrenched in U.S. primate facilities—including [Chagas disease](#), [Valley Fever](#), [West Nile virus](#), and lethal [diarrheal infections](#)—creating a cumulative burden of disease in crowded primate facilities that amplifies risks for workers, surrounding communities, and public health at large.

This is not the first time monkeys have run loose after a highway crash. In January 2022, when a truck carrying newly imported monkeys overturned in Pennsylvania, the CDC was on the scene within hours and ordered the escaped animals to be shot on sight because of the infectious disease threat they posed. A passerby who stopped to help was exposed to fluids from one of the monkeys and required medical treatment—a vivid reminder that these incidents are not theoretical risks but real public health events. That decisive CDC response was possible only because the monkeys were still under federal quarantine. By contrast, in Mississippi, the agency has been absent, leaving Tulane to control the narrative and publicly deny risk—even as its own staff wore full protective gear while trying to recapture the monkeys. Tulane has refused to say who owned the

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animals, where they were headed, what experiments they were destined for, or what pathogens they may have carried.

Transparency is the only safeguard, but the CDC has a pattern of warning insiders while leaving the public uninformed. Following recent cases of [*Burkholderia*](#) and [tuberculosis](#) in imported monkeys, the agency's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine issued alerts—but only to registered monkey importers and selected “stakeholders” with occupational exposure.

Communities living along transport routes, first responders called to crash scenes, and the public were never notified of the risks. Public records requests filed by PETA confirm that state health departments, too, are kept uninformed about the zoonotic pathogens circulating in primate laboratories and breeding facilities. The Mississippi crash shows just how reckless that silence is.

CDC cannot continue to outsource risk to the public. The agency must acknowledge its responsibility, increase transparency, and protect communities from the dangers posed not only by the primate trade but also by the presence of entrenched pathogens in U.S. primate facilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'LJE', is positioned above the typed name.

Lisa Jones-Engel, PhD.
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PETA