Dear Secretaries Becerra and Vilsack:

On behalf of the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) and more than 13,000 physicians, scientists, public health practitioners and other clinicians specializing in infectious diseases (ID) prevention, care, research and education, I appreciate your leadership in response to the outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

IDSA is prepared to offer ongoing support for the HPAI response and is eager to help the Administration continue taking steps to protect the public’s health. We appreciate the Administration’s response efforts thus far and provide some highlighted points below to suggest areas that IDSA members on the front lines feel are most critical right now. In addition, we have launched an HPAI task force of IDSA members that is available as a resource to federal agencies.

Much attention has been given to the importance of a One Health approach that recognizes the interconnection between people, animals, plants and their shared environment, especially in the face of emerging challenges like HPAI. To that end, much progress has been made; however, to fully embrace One Health, the collective health care and public health communities need to share critical questions, investigations and data with relevant agencies, organizations like IDSA and equivalent veterinary associations and the public.

Specifically, IDSA members from public health, academia and clinical practice are ready and willing to assist with the following priorities:

- Continued and broader implementation of active surveillance among animals and humans, including at-risk but asymptomatic persons, as well as, where appropriate, wastewater surveillance. It may be useful to consider innovative strategies to provide
financial support to farmers, veterinarians and the animal agricultural industry to avoid financial consequences preventing transparent data collection.

- Continued transparent and non alarmist public communication acknowledging uncertainty and timely updates as new information surfaces.
- Outreach tailored to at-risk communities using trusted messengers in the languages most commonly spoken to encourage appropriate precautions, educate on use of personal protective equipment and increase uptake of testing for symptoms.
- Rapid development, validation and widespread deployment of diagnostic testing and vaccines if necessary.
- Accelerated development and deployment of home influenza tests capable of detecting the H5N1 variant among at-risk communities.
- Proactive planning and communication to state public health officials about distribution of assets such as personal protective equipment and antivirals in the Strategic National Stockpile if necessary to manage a local outbreak.

**Infectious Diseases Workforce**

HPAI is the most recent in a series of outbreaks that clearly demonstrate the need for a strong public health infrastructure, including the ID workforce. Nearly 80% of U.S. counties lack an ID physician. Just over half of ID physician training programs and less than 50% of pediatric ID training programs filled in 2023, compared to most other physician specialties that filled nearly all their programs. Shortages in ID personnel are particularly acute in rural areas where agricultural workers are at greatest risk of contracting HPAI. In addition, research has shown that 80,000 more public health professionals – an increase of nearly 80% – are needed to provide a minimum package of public health services across the U.S.

These shortages need to be addressed to ensure that capacity is available to manage HPAI and future outbreaks. Financial barriers, namely high medical student debt and low reimbursement compared to other specialties, are a chief impediment to ID recruitment. **To address these challenges, we urge the Administration to prioritize funding for the Bio-Preparedness Workforce Pilot Program at the Health Resources and Services Administration and to include new codes or add-on codes to better capture unique ID physician services in the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule.**

Again, we thank you for your leadership at this crucial time, and we are committed to collaborating with you to inform and advance an HPAI response guided by research, scientific practice and equity. Please contact Amanda Jezek, IDSA senior vice president of public policy and government relations, with any questions at ajezek@idsociety.org.

Sincerely,

Steven K. Schmitt, MD, FIDSA, FACP
President

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