



November 14, 2024

Daniel Jernigan, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director  
National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Via e-mail: [dbj0@cdc.gov](mailto:dbj0@cdc.gov); [ncezidpolicyreview@cdc.gov](mailto:ncezidpolicyreview@cdc.gov)

Dear Dr. Jernigan:

Once again, a shipment of imported monkeys has arrived in the U.S., and even though an animal died en route, there is no indication that the CDC's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine veterinary medical officers or CDC quarantine public health officers inspected this shipment after it arrived at John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) on July 18, 2024. We're deeply concerned about the safety of these primates and the public, and we'd appreciate receiving your response to the issues raised below.

The CDC controls and regulates the flow of primates into the U.S. However, the agency's ongoing failure to apply best practices—including reliance on outdated, insensitive, and nonspecific screening assays; the practice of inspecting only a small percentage of shipments containing primates; and the conflict of interest and lack of transparency in the CDC-mandated quarantine system—are dangerous and threaten public health, especially in the case of recently imported primates. A recent congressionally mandated audit by the U.S. Government Accountability Office concluded that the **“CDC has not comprehensively identified and characterized risks related to imported wildlife. As a result, CDC's current approach may not be sufficient to prevent outbreaks”** [*emphasis added*].

On July 18, SmartLynx Airlines Malta Ltd. flight 2N6103 landed at JFK carrying a shipment of 332 long-tailed macaques. Documents released by the Brussels Animal Care & Inspection Center (ACIC) show that it would have been 333 monkeys, but one of the animals died en route. These monkeys were originally imported from Vietnam to Europe and subsequently transferred to the U.S.

A brief history of the shipment is below:

- Following importation from facilities in Vietnam, a total of 333 long-tailed macaques were quarantined in France (113) and Spain (220) for three months. They were boxed up, loaded into trucks, and driven to the ACIC at Brussels Airport on July 17.
- The staff at the ACIC provided water and biscuits for the animals and conducted a visual inspection. It appears that only a fraction of the monkeys

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

Washington  
1536 16th St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles  
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90026  
323-644-PETA

Norfolk  
501 Front St.  
Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org  
PETA.org

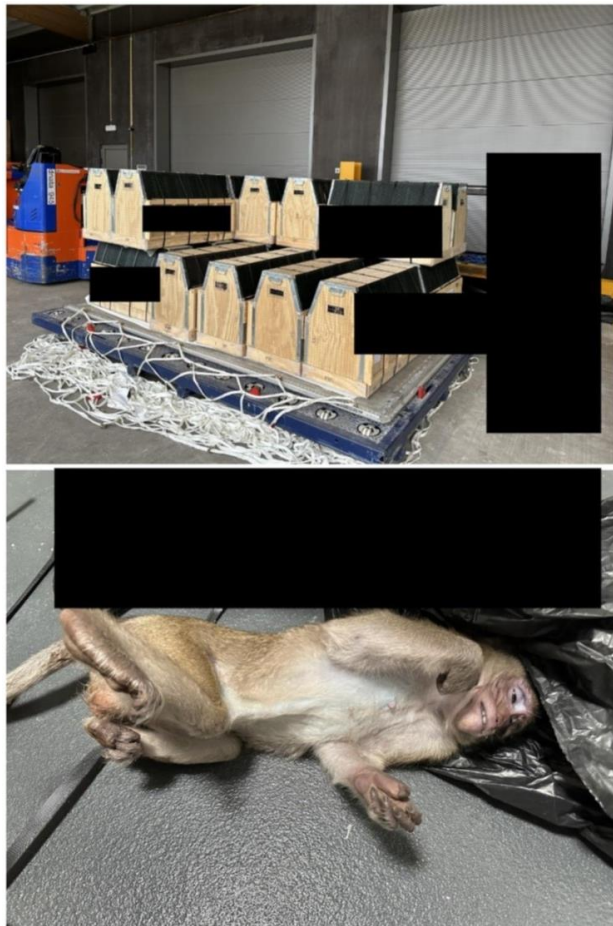
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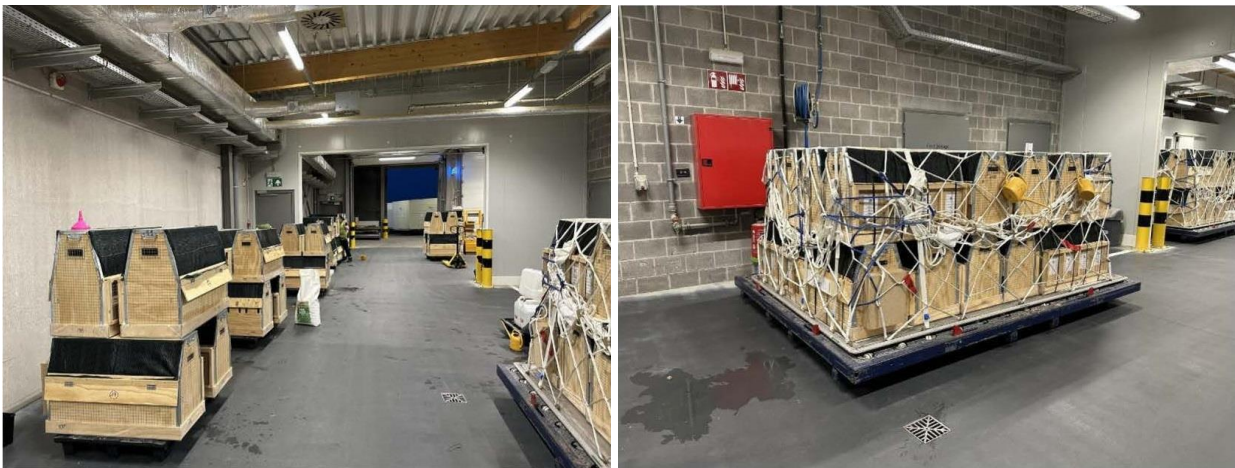
were inspected and photographed. Examples of those images are included below.



- Inspectors found that one of the monkeys was dead in a crate. They reported that they had removed the monkey from the crate and hypothesized that the animal had reacted badly to anesthesia during capture. There is no evidence in the inspection records that a necropsy to identify the cause of death or rule out any zoonotic illness was conducted on this animal, that any other scrutiny was undertaken, or that precautionary measures were put in place for the benefit of the other 332 monkeys in the shipment. The report included the image below of the dead monkey outside a crate.



- The remaining monkeys in that shipment were kept stacked one on top of another in wooden transport crates inside the ACIC building overnight. The next day, the crates of monkeys were loaded into a SmartLynx plane that had an approximately one-hour layover in Reykjavik, Iceland, before continuing on to JFK and landing at 3:55 p.m. ET.



- Inspection reports from recent shipments of monkeys destined for other countries documented alarming images of an animal with an anal prolapse, suggestive of severe diarrheal disease of unknown origin, and crates smeared with feces and blood.





The images taken and released by ACIC inspectors are extraordinary, documenting a step in the primate importation pipeline that has been kept from the public in the U.S. It's troubling that there does not appear to be a similar commitment to transparency by the CDC, particularly given that the U.S. is the biggest global importer of primates.

An in-transit monkey death, which appears not to have been noticed by or reported to CDC officials, is particularly concerning in light of the [CDC's own data](#) showing a recent surge in shipments of monkeys imported from Asia and arriving with animals infected with deadly zoonotic mycobacteria, other bacteria, or viruses. In 2023, [France, the Netherlands, and Spain saw outbreaks of tuberculosis among shipments of monkeys from Vietnam](#). Multiple shipments of monkeys [infected with diverse strains of tuberculosis](#) have arrived in the U.S., and [monkeys from Cambodia have arrived infected](#) with a bacterium so deadly that the U.S. classifies it as a bioterrorism agent.

The CDC must take action now and stop shifting the burden of the necessary ongoing disease surveillance of imported primates to other countries that these animals may be transported through or to the states in which they will eventually be confined.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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

Lisa Jones-Engel, Ph.D.  
Senior Science Advisor, Primate Experimentation  
Laboratory Investigations Department  
[LisaJE@peta.org](mailto:LisaJE@peta.org)