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WHO Declares Mpox a Global Health Emergency Amid Rapid Spread of New Strain in Central Africa and Neighboring Countries

WHO initiates emergency vaccine access as over 100 confirmed cases of the new mpox strain are reported in countries surrounding the DRC; coordinated intl efforts underway to prevent further spread, with focus on low-income nations

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A growing number of cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other African countries has prompted the World Health Organization to declare mpox a public health emergency of international concern.?

Endemic to central and western Africa, mpox – formerly called monkeypox – came to the attention of the wider public due to a [multi-country outbreak in 2022](#), in nations where the viral disease is not endemic. Then, cases were mainly identified in men who have sex with men, and public health interventions were mainly targeted towards that demographic. The public health emergency was declared over in May 2023, after case levels declined around the world.

However, a new strain of the mpox virus has reportedly emerged and is spreading rapidly, mainly through sexual networks, the WHO says, prompting this week’s declaration of a new public health emergency of international concern. In the last month, over 100 laboratory-confirmed cases of the new strain have been reported in several countries neighboring the DRC which had never before reported mpox. The true caseload is anticipated to be higher, authorities believe, as a large number of suspected mpox cases have not been tested in a laboratory.?

“With the growing spread of the virus, we’re scaling up further through coordinated international action to support countries [to] bring the outbreaks to an end,” said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO regional director for Africa.

?WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus has activated the process by which mpox vaccines can receive Emergency Use Listing. There are currently two vaccines in use for mpox, and the WHO anticipates that Emergency Use Listing “will accelerate vaccine access for lower-income countries which have not yet issued their own national regulatory approval,” as well as enable “partners including Gavi and UNICEF to procure vaccines for distribution.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the 2022 mpox outbreak resulted in just over 32,000 cases in the United States, with 58 total deaths. Neighboring territory Puerto Rico reported 221 cases, while none were reported in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Nevertheless, the V.I. Department of Health in 2022 reported having 100 doses of mpox vaccine available should cases be detected in the territory.