

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVICE ON MPOX

MPOX SITUATION IN THE REGION AND IN THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Since May 2022, mpox cases have been reported from countries without previously documented transmission. As of 18 August 2024, the WHO African Region has reported 17,947 suspected mpox cases, including 563 suspected deaths and 2,186 laboratory-confirmed cases, with 13 confirmed deaths across 12 countries since January 2024. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains the hardest hit, accounting for 86.4% of all confirmed cases in the region in 2024, with 1,888 confirmed cases and eight deaths reported this year.

As a result of the upsurge in the number of cases and countries affected in the African region during July and August 2024, the Director General of the World Health Organisation declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 14 August 2024, to elevate international coordination and support of ongoing mpox response in affected countries.

In 2024, the Republic of Congo reported a total of 19 confirmed cases of pox. The outbreak is geographically limited to regions in the country's northeastern departments. No cases of mpox have been confirmed in the capital city of Brazzaville and its surrounding departments. The most recent case in the country was reported in March 2024, and the major pattern of transmission is zoonotic spillover with household transmission.

WHAT IS MPOX?

- Mpox, previously known as Monkeypox, is an infectious viral zoonotic disease caused by the monkeypox virus, which is an Orthopoxvirus genus in the family Poxviridae. Two different clades exist: **Clade I** and **Clade II**.
- The symptoms begin with flu-like symptoms such as **fever, headache, muscle aches, backache and exhaustion**. Lymphadenopathy (swelling of the lymph nodes) is also common and can help distinguish it from other pox-like diseases. Include **skin rash** or **mucosal lesions accompanied by fever, swollen lymph nodes, sore throat, and body aches**, among others.
- The rash begins within 1 to 3 days (sometimes longer) after the onset of fever. The rash often starts on the face and then spreads to other parts of the body, including the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It goes through different stages—**macules, papules, vesicles, pustules**—before finally **forming scabs**, which eventually fall off.
- Mpox spreads from person to person via direct contact or through exposure to infected animals or contaminated materials.
- The incubation period of mpox is usually 6–13 days but can range from 2–21 days.
- Most people will recover within 2-4 weeks with appropriate care.
- In Africa, the mpox outbreak in 2024 is characterised by a mixed pattern of zoonotic and person-to-person transmission (few have been through sexual contact).

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HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

You can catch mpox through close contact with someone who has symptoms including:

- Skin-to-skin (providing care without PPE, hugging, touching, including sexual contact)
- Face-to-face (droplets during talking)
- Mouth-to-skin (oral sex)
- Mouth-to-mouth (e.g., kissing)
- From contaminated bedding, towels, clothing, surfaces or objects.
- Bites or scratches from infected animals
- Direct contact with the blood, bodily fluids, or skin/mucosal lesions of infected animals.

The risk of mpox is not limited to people who are sexually active or gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men. Anyone who has close contact with someone who has symptoms or someone who comes in close contact with sick/dead animals is at risk.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF?

- To protect yourself and others against mpox, know the signs and symptoms, how the virus spreads, what to do if you get ill.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has mpox, including sexual contact.
- Do not share bedding or clothing with individuals who are sick with mpox.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid close physical contact with people who are showing symptoms of mpox.
- Wear protective clothing if you are caring for someone who is infected. If you think you might have mpox, you can act to protect others by seeking medical advice and isolating yourself from others until you have been evaluated and tested.
- If you have mpox, you should isolate yourself from others until all your lesions have crusted over, the scabs have fallen off, and a new layer of skin has formed underneath. This will stop you from passing on the virus to others.

WHAT DO I DO IF I SUSPECT THAT I HAVE MPOX?

- Isolate and avoid contact with others as much as possible.
- If you must interact with others, wear a mask and cover any lesions to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
- Contact a health worker to get advice and follow the recommendations.
- Get tested and wait for the results.
- Do not scratch or touch the rash or lesions, as this can worsen the condition and increase the risk of spreading the virus.
- Frequently wash hands with soap and water, especially after touching your face, the rash or anything that may have come into contact with the virus.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Protect others by avoiding contact with them.

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IS THERE ANY SPECIAL GUIDANCE FOR TRAVEL?

WHO advises that countries establish or strengthen cross-border collaboration arrangements for surveillance and management of suspect cases of mpox, the provision of information to travellers and conveyance operators, **without resorting to general travel and trade restrictions unnecessarily impacting local, regional or national economies. The Republic of Congo has not implemented any travel restrictions related to Mpox.**

Risk assessment for the regional committee and mitigation measures: Based on currently available surveillance data, no case of mpox has been detected at the meeting location of Brazzaville and its surrounding departments. It is unlikely for meeting participants to get infected via local communities and animals, therefore the risk is very low. In addition, meeting delegates are primarily comprised of health professionals who are cognizant of the importance of precautionary measures and better informed to apply individual-level responsibility to their decisions and actions.

However, during the meeting, like any other large gathering, the frequent interactions between attendees, including talking or breathing very closely to others and the mobility of attendees, present a minimal risk. Measures have been taken to mitigate this risk, and delegates are encouraged to practice the mitigation measures as explained below.

The general public and visitors to the Republic of Congo are encouraged to observe the basic public health and social measures for mpox prevention and control.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR MASS GATHERINGS (RC74).

1. **Hand Hygiene:** Delegates are encouraged to wash their hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitisers, which will be freely provided at the RC74 event.
“All participants for the RC74 event are encouraged to carry hand sanitisers and any prescription medications for regular use.”
2. **Mask Availability:** Disposable masks will be available to anyone experiencing respiratory symptoms or feeling particularly vulnerable.
3. **To reduce the risk of transmission,** it’s recommended to avoid close or intimate contact, including shaking hands, hugging, and kissing. Mpox can spread through direct skin-to-skin contact with infected lesions.
4. **Conference Room Cleaning:** The conference rooms will undergo cleaning with standard disinfection procedures at least three times a day (before the meeting, during lunchtime, and after the meeting). Particular attention will be given to high-touch surfaces.
5. **Sanitisation of Common Areas:** Toilets, bathrooms, and other common surfaces will be thoroughly cleaned multiple times a day, using WHO-recommended disinfectants to prevent contamination.
6. **In the unlikely event that an international delegate** develops symptoms and is confirmed positive for Mpox, arrangements will be made for isolation within the country. *If necessary, arrangements for further care will be made as advised by the physicians.*

For questions, please contact:

WHO Department of Staff Health and Well-being | Département de la santé et du bien-être du personnel
Email: afrgogmchmsafro@who.int Regional Staff Physician: +242 06 735 8957