

WORLD NEWS

World Health Organization Declares Mpox Outbreak in Africa a Global Health Emergency

WHO director-general accepts recommendation from committee.

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World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus attends a press conference on the World Health Organization's 75th anniversary in Geneva, Switzerland, on April 6, 2023. (Fabrice Coffrini/AFP via Getty Images)



By [Zachary Stieber](#)

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The World Health Organization (WHO) on Aug. 14 declared the outbreak of mpox, formerly known as monkeypox, in Africa a public health emergency of international concern because of the increase in cases and deaths in recent months.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the WHO, announced the declaration in Geneva, Switzerland, accepting a recommendation from the WHO's emergency committee.

Tedros said there have already been more than 14,000 reported cases and 524 reported deaths in Africa this year, a jump from last year. He also pointed to the emergence of a new mpox strain, or clade, which he described as worrying.

“In addition to other outbreaks of other clades of mpox in other parts of Africa, it's clear that a coordinated international response is essential to stop these outbreaks and save lives,” Tedros said at a briefing.

Mpox is a virus that occurs in animals and humans. Mpox can spread between people and causes an illness that typically manifests with a rash and resolves in a few weeks. But some cases can lead to death.

Mpox has predominately affected men who have sex with other men.

A public health emergency of international concern, or global health emergency, is the highest level of alarm the WHO can convey. It's declared for extraordinary events deemed to constitute a public health risk to countries through the international spread of disease.

COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency of international concern in 2020. That declaration ended in 2023 after the number of cases dropped considerably.

The WHO declared mpox a public health emergency of international concern in 2022 but ended the declaration on May 11, 2023. Tedros, at that time, said countries had curbed the mpox outbreak, which was caused by a strain known as clade 2b.

The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention earlier this week [declared](#) a public emergency over the mpox outbreak.

“Today I commit to you that African citizens will lead this fight with every resource at our disposal,” Jean Kaseya, head of the agency, said at a briefing.

He said Africa was working on securing more vaccines, as it has only about 200,000 doses at this time, but he estimates that it will need more than 10 million.

The new emergence of the new variant, clade 1b, in the Democratic Republic of Congo has stoked concerns.

Clade 1, also known as the Congo Basin clade, has historically caused more severe disease than clade 2, which has also been described as the West African clade.

Clade 1b cases have been identified in other African countries, including Kenya and Uganda, prompting Tedros to convene the emergency committee to consider advising that a global health emergency be declared. Some of those nations had never before found a case of mpox.

“We believe that it’s already a risk for international spread. And of course, there is also the chance that it could spread beyond Africa to other regions of the world,” Tedros said.

All clade 1 cases have been identified in Africa, meaning that the risk in the United States is low, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. European authorities have also assessed that the risk is low. But officials have warned doctors to be on the lookout for cases among people who have recently been to Congo or neighboring countries.

The WHO has already been on the ground working with affected countries in Africa, providing machines to analyze blood samples and training health care workers, according to the organization. The WHO stated the work will cost \$15 million and has asked for donations to cover part of the cost.

“WHO is committed in the days and weeks ahead to coordinate the global response, working closely with each of the affected countries, and leveraging our on-the-ground presence, to prevent transmission, treat those infected, and save lives,” Tedros said.

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