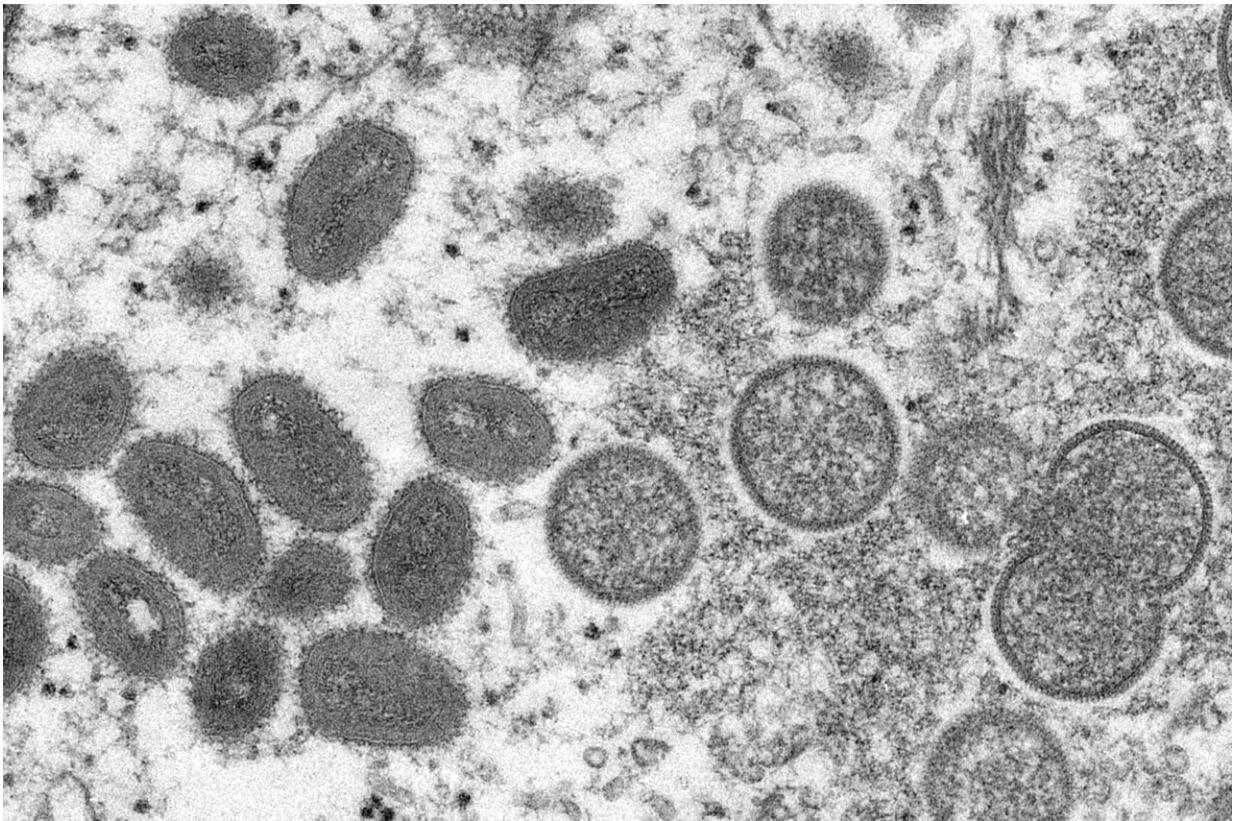


WHO: Monkeypox cases in Europe have tripled in last 2 weeks

July 1 2022, By MARIA CHENG



This 2003 electron microscope image made available by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows mature, oval-shaped monkeypox virions, left, and spherical immature virions, right, obtained from a sample of human skin associated with the 2003 prairie dog outbreak. U.S. health officials are expanding the group of people recommended to get vaccinated against the monkeypox virus. They also say they are providing more monkeypox vaccine, working to expand testing, and taking other steps to try to get ahead of the outbreak. Credit: Cynthia S. Goldsmith, Russell Regner/CDC via AP, file

The World Health Organization's Europe chief warned Friday that monkeypox cases in the region have tripled in the last two weeks and urged countries to do more to ensure the previously rare disease does not become entrenched on the continent.

Dr. Hans Kluge said in a statement that increased efforts were needed despite the U.N. health agency's decision [last week](#) that the escalating outbreak did not yet warrant being declared a global health emergency.

"Urgent and coordinated action is imperative if we are to turn a corner in the race to reverse the ongoing spread of this disease," Kluge said.

To date, more than 5,000 monkeypox cases have been reported from 51 countries worldwide, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Kluge said the number of infections in Europe represents about 90% of the global total, noting that 31 countries in the WHO's European region have now identified cases.

Kluge said data reported to the WHO show that 99% of cases have been in men—and that the majority of those have been in men that have sex with men. But he said there were now "small numbers" of cases among household contacts, including children. Most people reported symptoms including a rash, fever, fatigue, muscle pain, vomiting and chills.

Scientists warn anyone who is in close physical contact with someone who has monkeypox or their clothing or bedsheets is at risk of infection, regardless of their sexual orientation. Vulnerable populations like children and pregnant women are thought to be more likely to suffer severe disease.

About 10% of patients were hospitalized for treatment or to be isolated,

and one person was admitted to an intensive care unit. No deaths have been reported.

Kluge said the problem of stigmatization in some countries might make some people wary of seeking health care and said the WHO was working with partners including organizers of gay pride events.

In the U.K., which has the [biggest monkeypox](#) outbreak beyond Africa, officials have noted the disease is spreading in "defined sexual networks of gay, bisexual, or men who have sex with men." British health authorities said there were no signs suggesting sustained transmission beyond those populations.

A leading WHO adviser said in May that the spike in cases in Europe was likely tied to [sexual activity by men](#) at two rave parties in Spain and Belgium, speculating that its appearance in the gay and bisexual community was a "random event." British experts have said most cases in the U.K. involve men who reported having sex with other men in venues such as saunas and sex clubs.

Ahead of gay pride events in the U.K. this weekend, London's top public health doctor asked people who have symptoms of monkeypox, like swollen glands or blisters, to stay home.

WHO Europe director Kluge appealed to countries to scale up their surveillance and genetic sequencing capacities for monkeypox so that cases could be quickly identified and measures taken to prevent further transmission. He said the procurement of vaccines "must apply the principles of equity."

The main vaccine being used against monkeypox was originally developed for smallpox and the [European Medicines Agency](#) said earlier this week it was beginning to evaluate whether the shot should be

authorized for monkeypox. The WHO has said supplies of the vaccine, made by Bavarian Nordic, are extremely limited.

Some countries including the U.K. and Germany have already begun vaccinating people at high-risk of monkeypox; the U.K. recently widened its immunization program to offer the shot to mostly gay and bisexual men who have multiple sexual partners and are thought to be most vulnerable.

Until May, monkeypox had never been known to cause large outbreaks beyond Africa, where the disease is endemic in several countries and mostly causes limited outbreaks when it jumps to people from infected wild animals.

To date, there have been about 1,800 suspected monkeypox cases including more than 70 deaths in Africa. Vaccines have never been used to stop monkeypox outbreaks in Africa.

The WHO's Africa office said this week that countries with vaccine supplies "are mainly reserving them for their own populations."

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