

Republic of Congo reports its first mpox virus cases, in several regions

March 14 2024, by Louis Patrick Okamba



Vials of single doses of the Jynneos vaccine for monkeypox are seen from a cooler at a vaccinations site on Aug. 29, 2022, in the Brooklyn borough of New York. The Republic of Congo has recorded its first cases of mpox in several regions, the health ministry said, an indication of how the disease may be spreading across Africa since sexual transmission was first confirmed on the continent last year. Credit: AP Photo/Jeenah Moon, File

The Republic of Congo has recorded its first cases of mpox in several regions, the health ministry said, an indication of how the disease may be spreading across Africa since sexual transmission was first confirmed on the continent last year.

Mpox is a virus that originates in wild animals and occasionally jumps to people, who can spread it to others. The virus was previously known as monkeypox, because it was first seen in research monkeys.

The World Health Organization said in November it had confirmed sexual transmission of mpox in neighboring Congo for the first time. African scientists warned this could make the disease difficult to contain.

The Republic of Congo's health ministry published its report on Wednesday. The report said some 43 cases had been reported to the ministry, including in nine out of the country's 12 departments. The government has not issued any further comment on the publication, which was not officially distributed to the media and appears to have been intended for internal use.

Mpox became a focus of worldwide concern during an international outbreak in 2022 that saw the disease spread to over 100 countries, mainly by sex among gay or bisexual men. Mpox has been endemic in parts of central and west Africa for decades, but most cases involved infection from rodents, limiting the spread of the disease.

The WHO declared the outbreak a global emergency and there have been over 90,000 cases to date. In Congo, where sexual transmission was first confirmed, it has tracked more than 12,500 cases and 580 deaths, its largest ever outbreak.

The WHO previously warned that sexual transmission could mean the

disease is spreading in other parts of the continent.

In Africa, the figures are likely an underestimate, experts say, because testing facilities are limited and victims may avoid stepping forward because of prejudice and draconian laws targeting LGBTQ+ communities.

While the outbreak of mpox prompted mass vaccination campaigns in Europe and North America, in Africa there are no such plans.

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