

South Africa's health authorities report 2 deaths from mpox this week and warn of local transmission

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Vials of single doses of the Jynneos vaccine for mpox are seen from a cooler at a vaccinations site on Aug. 29, 2022, in the Brooklyn borough of New York. South African health authorities have reported two deaths from mpox in the space of three days. Health Minister Joe Phaahla says Thursday the two fatalities this week were among six recent confirmed cases of mpox in South Africa, all of them men in their 30s. Credit: AP Photo/Jeenah Moon, File

South African health authorities say two people have died this week after contracting mpox, and it appears there is local transmission of the disease.

The [health ministry](#) said Thursday that a 38-year-old man died in the eastern KwaZulu-Natal province on Wednesday, the same day a [laboratory test](#) confirmed that he had contracted the virus. Another man died Monday in a hospital near Johannesburg, the ministry said.

Health Minister Joe Phaahla said the two deaths were among six recent confirmed cases of mpox in South Africa, all of them in men in their 30s. Some had multiple [sexual partners](#), including men and women. Genetic tests for the first three cases showed the men had the less severe version of mpox, which spread globally in an outbreak that began in 2022.

In all cases, the men had no travel history to countries currently experiencing an outbreak, "which suggests there is local transmission of this infectious disease," Phaahla said.

He said the six men had underlying conditions. The latest man to die had HIV. Mpox is known to be more deadly in people with other [health conditions](#), particularly those that weaken their immune systems.

Mpox, also known as monkeypox, is a [rare disease](#) caused by infection with a virus that's in the same family as the one that causes smallpox. It is common to other parts of Africa, where people are often infected through bites from rodents or other small animals.

Mpox was not known to spread easily among people until 2022, when authorities detected [epidemics](#) in Europe, North America and elsewhere

and the World Health Organization declared it a global emergency. That epidemic also marked the first time that mpox was seen to spread via sex; the majority of people affected were gay or bisexual men. The U.N. health agency said last year mpox was no longer an international crisis.

WHO reported last month that there had been 186 mpox deaths worldwide since 2022, with a fatality rate of less than 1%.

South Africa last recorded an mpox case in 2022, Phaahla said. He said South Africa doesn't have any vaccines but was considering obtaining doses and rolling out an immunization campaign.

Phaahla said the outbreak in South Africa is distinct from the ongoing epidemic in [Congo](#), where a more lethal form of the disease might be fueling the country's biggest-ever outbreak.

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