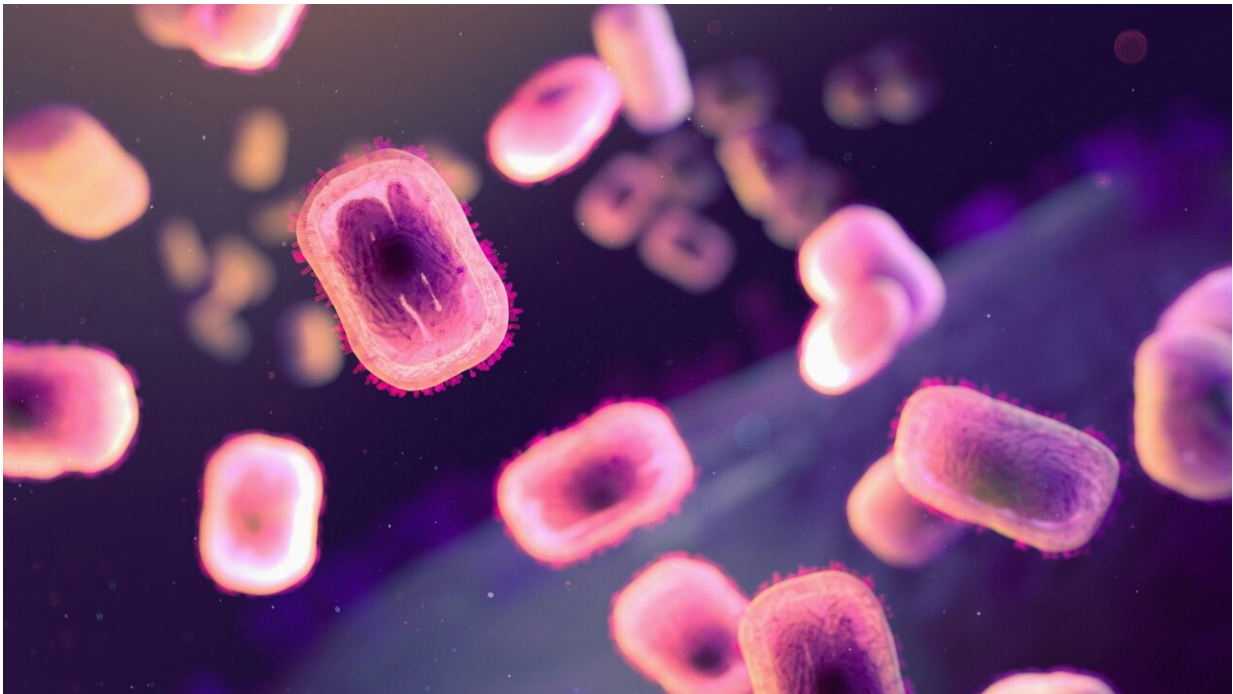


Africa CDC likely to declare mpox health emergency: director

August 8 2024



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The African Union's health watchdog said on Thursday it was "likely" to declare a public health emergency next week over the growing mpox outbreak on the continent.

The decision will unlock funding to combat the outbreak, including the procurement of much-needed vaccines, and trigger a coordinated

continental response to the virus.

Jean Kaseya, head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), said during an online media briefing that the declaration of the health emergency was "likely" next week.

At least 16 countries of the continent's 55 nations have been affected with mpox, according to the Africa CDC.

Some 38,465 cases and 1,456 deaths have been reported in Africa since January 2022.

Of these, 887 cases and five deaths were reported last week, according to data from Africa CDC.

"We are moving from two outbreaks per week to three new outbreaks per week," Kaseya said, adding that there was a shortage of vaccines on the continent.

Formerly known as monkeypox, mpox is an infectious disease caused by a virus transmitted to humans by infected animals but can also be passed from human to human through close physical contact.

The disease causes fever, muscular aches and large boil-like skin lesions.

The World Health Organization announced Wednesday it was urgently convening an expert committee to advise on whether the growing mpox outbreak in Africa should be declared an international emergency.

"The committee will meet as soon as possible and will be made up of independent experts from a range of relevant disciplines from around the world," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference.

The committee will advise him on whether the outbreak represents a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC)—the highest alarm the WHO can sound.

Only Tedros, as the WHO director-general, can declare a PHEIC, based on the expert committee's advice. A declaration then triggers emergency responses in countries worldwide under the legally binding International Health Regulations.

Deadlier strain

Mpox was first discovered in humans in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

There are two subtypes of the virus: the more virulent and deadlier Clade I, endemic in the Congo Basin in central Africa; and Clade II, endemic in West Africa.

In May 2022, mpox infections surged worldwide, mostly affecting gay and bisexual men, due to the Clade IIb subclade.

Deadlier and more transmissible than previous forms, the mpox strain surging in the DRC since September, known as the Clade Ib subclade, is spread person-to-person.

The Clade Ib strain causes skin rashes across the whole body, unlike other strains where lesions and rashes are usually limited to the mouth, face and genitals.

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Citation: Africa CDC likely to declare mpox health emergency: director (2024, August 8) retrieved 8 August 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-08-africa-cdc-declare-mpox-health.html>

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