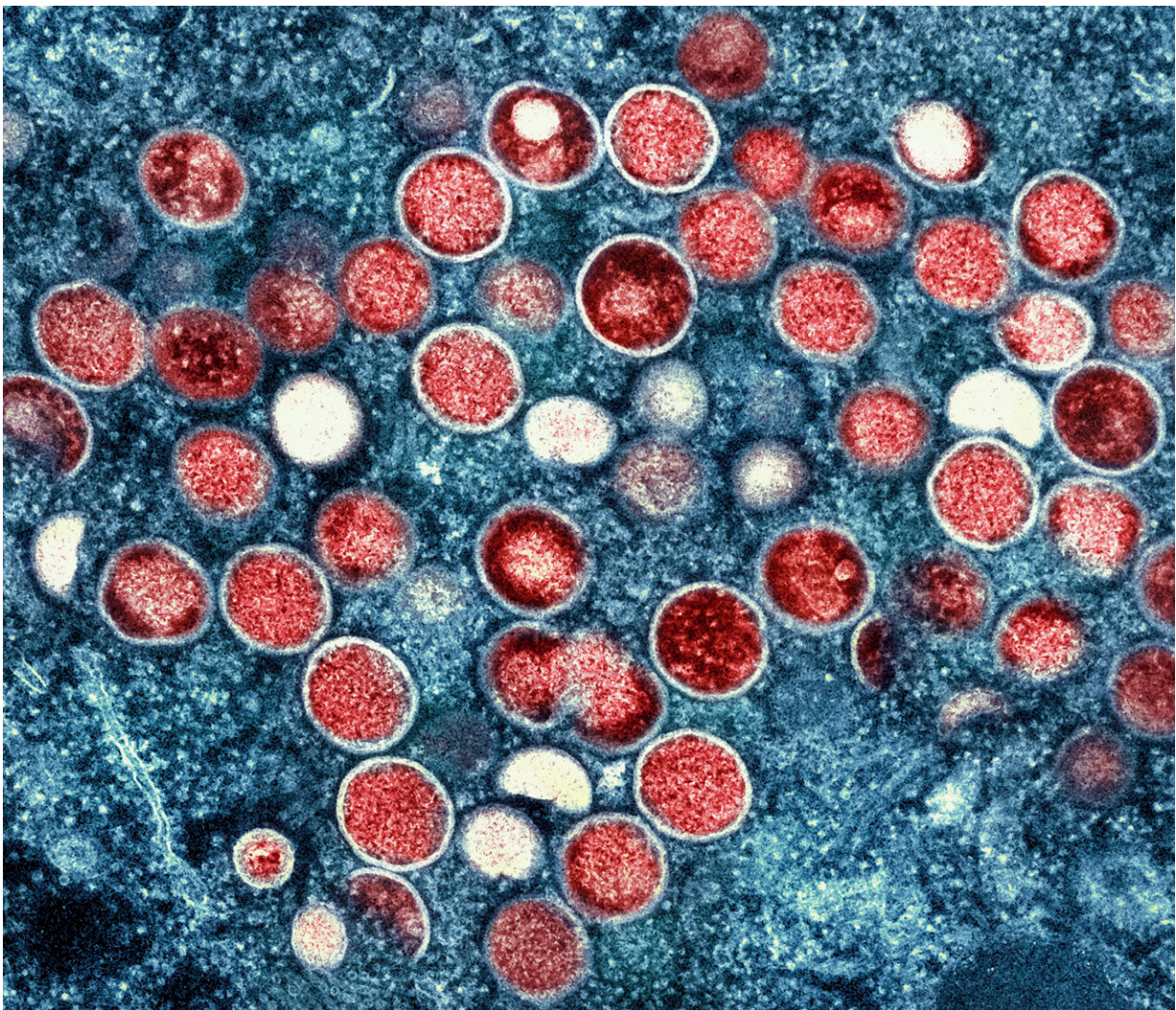


UN health agency convening experts to determine if the mpox outbreak in Africa is a global emergency

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This image provided by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

shows a colorized transmission electron micrograph of monkeypox particles (red) found within an infected cell (blue), cultured in the laboratory that was captured and color-enhanced at the NIAID Integrated Research Facility in Fort Detrick, Md. Kenya and the Central African Republic declared new outbreaks of mpox Wednesday, July 31, 2024, as Africa's health officials are racing to contain the spread of the disease in a region lacking vaccines. Credit: NIAID via AP, File

The head of the World Health Organization said Wednesday he will convene an expert group to determine if the increasing spread of the mpox virus in Africa warrants being declared a global emergency.

At a press briefing in Geneva, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that given the increasing spread of mpox cases beyond Congo, he has decided to ask independent experts to advise WHO "as soon as possible."

Last week, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that mpox, also known as monkeypox, has now been detected in 10 African countries this year including Congo, which has more than 96% of all cases and deaths. Compared with the same time period last year, the agency said cases are up 160% and deaths have jumped by 19%.

Officials at the Africa CDC said nearly 70% of cases in Congo are in children younger than 15, who also accounted for 85% of deaths.

Mpox was reported last week in Burundi and Rwanda for the first time while other countries including Kenya and the Central African Republic also identified cases.

WHO's Tedros said the agency has released \$1 million from its

emergency fund to support the response to mpox, also known as monkeypox.

Earlier this year, scientists reported the emergence of a [new form](#) of the deadlier version of mpox, which can kill up to 10% of people, in a Congolese mining town that they feared might spread more easily among people. Mpox spreads via close contact with infected people, including via sex.

In 2022, WHO declared mpox to be a global emergency after it spread to more than 70 countries, mostly affecting gay and bisexual men. Before that outbreak, the disease had mostly been seen in sporadic epidemics in central and West Africa when people came into contact with infected animals.

Western countries mostly shut down the spread of mpox with the help of vaccines and treatments, but very few of those have been available in Africa.

Maria Van Kerkhove, who leads WHO's outbreak department, said there were numerous concerning issues in Africa's mpox epidemic and called for a more urgent response.

"We do not want the world to sit and watch and wait," she said. "The time (to act) is now."

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