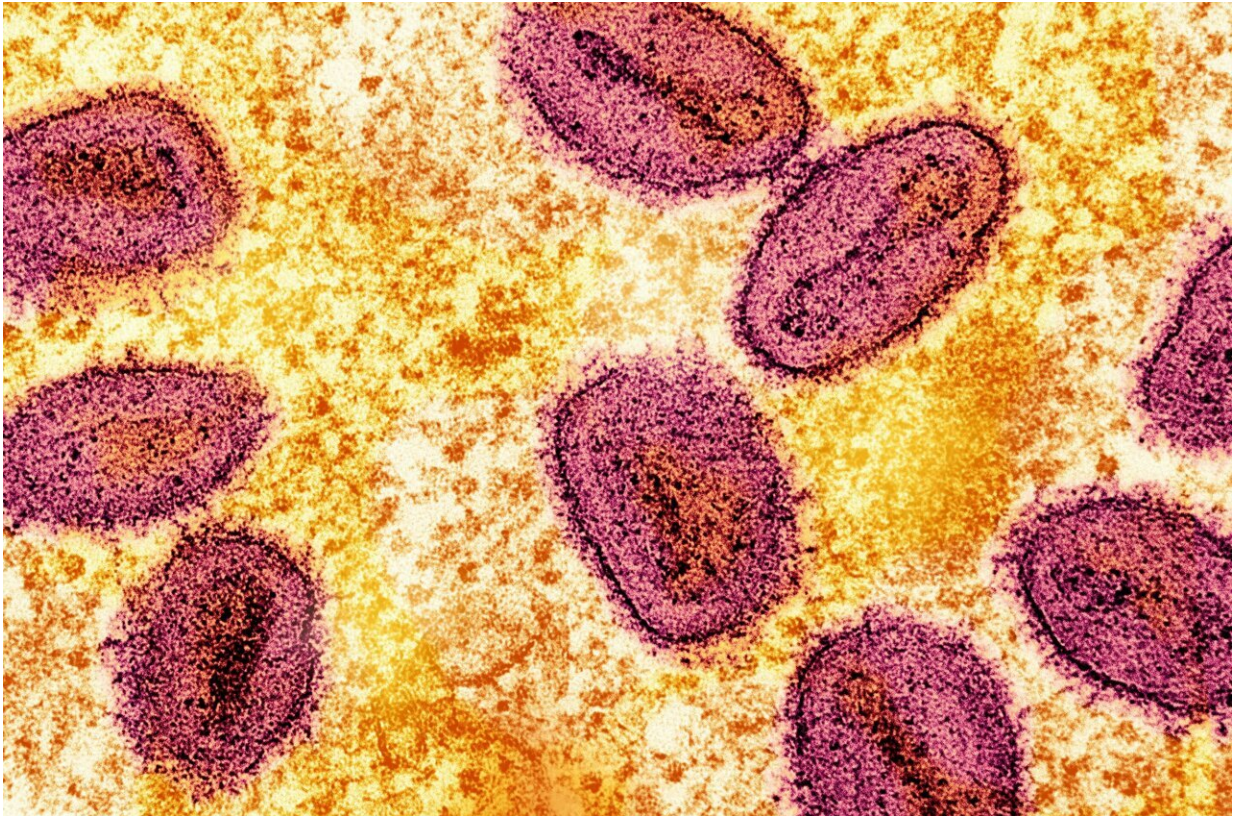


# Mpox epidemic disinformation debunked

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

An mpox outbreak spreading across several African countries, which the World Health Organization has called a global emergency, has caused a spike in online disinformation about the viral disease.

**No links to shingles or the COVID vaccine**

In a video circulated on X and Facebook, Wolfgang Wodarg, a German doctor known for his anti-vaccine views, claimed that mpox and shingles shared the same symptoms.

The physician also accused the pharmaceutical industry of frightening people to make profit.

This is false. Mpox is not a shingles epidemic caused by the COVID-19 vaccine.

Much is already known about the virus and the means to control it. Mpox, which was first detected in the 1970s in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), long predates COVID vaccines.

The disease, which is caused by a virus transmitted by infected animals but passed from human to human through close physical contact, belongs to the family of poxviruses—whereas shingles is a kind of herpes.

Symptoms also differ, with shingles causing smaller, painful lesions and rashes.

## **Mpox does not affect only gay men**

Some social media users have dismissed their risk of contracting mpox with homophobic comments.

"There is no infectious disease in the world whose transmission is limited by a person's sexual orientation," said Richard Martinello, an infectious disease specialist at Yale University.

"It is close, skin-to-[skin contact](#) which can lead to the spread of mpox, not one's sexual orientation."

The virus is carried by liquid enclosed in vesicles—small pimples that form on the skin—said Antoine Gessain, an mpox expert at the Pasteur Institute, adding that children can be infected through skin contact.

Heterosexuals with multiple partners, the population that drove the epidemic in the DRC in late 2023, can also transmit the disease.

## **No miracle cure**

A popular conspiracy theory sparked by a 2022 video by controversial French researcher Didier Raoult has re-emerged on social media.

According to Raoult, a very effective drug used to treat mpox exists but is not made available.

The "most effective molecule" against mpox is "a Japanese drug called Tranilast," he said in the [video](#).

"It will never be marketed here (Europe) because it is extremely cheap."

But Tranilast, which was approved in 1982 in Japan and China to treat asthma, has never been clinically tested on humans for treating mpox.

However, vaccination combined with educating at-risk individuals and isolating contact cases, helped the world contain the 2022 mpox outbreak.

Raoult, who is the former head of France's IHU Mediterranée research hospital, has been accused by French medical bodies of conducting "the largest 'unauthorised' clinical trial ever seen" into the use of hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19.

## WHO has not ordered lockdowns

"The WHO cannot and has not ordered governments to prepare for 'mega lockdowns' or any kind of lockdown due to mpox," the organization told AFP, debunking disinformation that has spread online.

The UN agency added that while its mission is to provide "technical advice and support," countries retain "the sovereignty to take decisions and actions concerning the health of their populations."

For some conspiracy theorists, mpox is what they call a "plandemic," a pandemic orchestrated by the WHO—which they say is being manipulated by major pharmaceutical companies.

Tiktok users have alleged that the start of the school year had been delayed in France due to [mpox](#). Contacted by AFP, the French Education Ministry rejected the claims.

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