

Mpox outbreaks in Africa could be ended in 6 months, WHO chief says

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People sit at the Don Bosco refugee camp as Red Cross officials create awareness around mpox in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Thursday, Aug. 22, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Moses Sawasawa

The head of the World Health Organization believes the ongoing [mpox](#)

outbreaks in Africa might be stopped in the next six months, and said Friday that the agency's first [shipment of vaccines](#) should arrive in Congo within days.

To date, Africa has received just a tiny fraction of the vaccines needed to slow the spread of the virus, especially [in Congo, which has the most cases](#)—more than 18,000 suspected cases and 629 deaths.

"With the governments' leadership and close cooperation between partners, we believe we can stop these outbreaks in the next six months," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a press briefing.

He said that while mpox infections have been rising quickly in the last few weeks, there have been relatively few deaths. Tedros also noted there were 258 cases of the newest version of mpox, with patients identified in Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Sweden and Thailand.

Earlier this month, WHO declared the ongoing mpox outbreaks in Africa a [global emergency](#), hoping to spur a robust global response to the disease on a continent where cases were [spreading largely unnoticed](#) for years, including in Nigeria. In May, scientists detected a [new version](#) of the disease in Congo that they think could be spreading more easily.



Un trabajador de salud revisa a un paciente con viruela símica en un centro de atención en Munigi, en el este de la República Democrática del Congo, el lunes 19 de agosto de 2024. Credit: AP Foto/Moses Sawasawa



Red Cross officials create awareness around mpox in the Don Bosco refugee camp in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Thursday, Aug. 22, 2023.
Credit: AP Photo/Moses Sawasawa



A girl suffering from mpox walks past a treatment centre in Munigi, eastern Congo, Monday, Aug. 19, 2024. Congo will receive the first vaccine doses to address its mpox outbreak next week from the United States, the country's health minister said Monday, days after the World Health Organization declared mpox outbreaks in Africa a global emergency. Credit: AP Photo/Moses Sawasawa

Mpox, also known as monkeypox, is related to smallpox but typically causes milder symptoms, including fever, headache and body aches. In severe cases, people can develop painful sores and blisters on the face, chest, hands and genitals. Mpox is typically spread via close skin-to-skin contact.

WHO estimated about 230,000 vaccines could be sent "imminently" to Congo and elsewhere. The agency said it was also working on education

campaigns to raise awareness of how people could avoid spreading mpox in countries with outbreaks.

Maria Van Kerkhove, who directs WHO's epidemic and pandemic diseases department, said the agency was working to expedite vaccine access for affected countries—given the limited supply available.

Scientists have previously pointed out that without a better understanding of how mpox is spreading in Africa, it may be difficult to know how best to use the shots.

Earlier this week, the head of Africa's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the continent was hoping to receive about 380,000 doses of mpox vaccines promised by donors, including the U.S. and the European Union. That's less than 15% of the doses authorities have said are needed to end the mpox outbreaks in Congo.

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