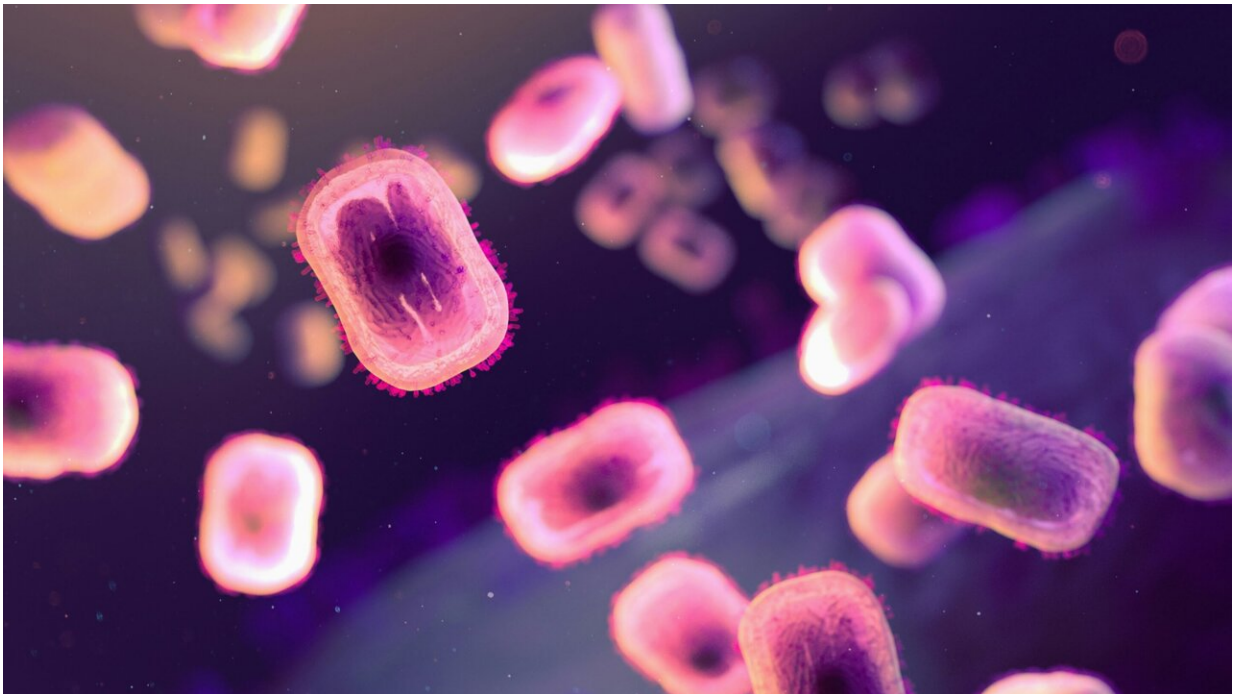


Mpox kills 548 in DR Congo, case recorded in Sweden

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The Democratic Republic of Congo said Thursday an mpox outbreak has killed 548 people there this year, as the first case outside Africa of the virus's more dangerous variant was recorded in a traveler in Sweden.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Wednesday declared the mpox surge in Africa a global public health emergency, worried by the

rise in cases in the DRC and the spread to nearby countries.

DRC's Health Minister Samuel-Roger Kamba said in a video message that the country "has recorded 15,664 potential cases and 548 deaths since the beginning of the year", with all provinces affected.

The DRC is made up of 26 provinces and has a population of around 100 million.

The most affected provinces are South Kivu, North Kivu, Tshopo, Equateur, North Ubangi, Tshuapa, Mongala and Sankuru, Kamba said.

He said the government had put in place a "national strategic plan for vaccination against mpox", as well as improving surveillance of the disease at borders and checkpoints.

The minister said that at government level working groups have been set up to boost contact tracing and help mobilize resources to "maintain control of this epidemic".

Traveler diagnosed in Sweden

Sweden's Public Health Agency told AFP Thursday that it had registered a case of the same strain of the virus that has surged in the DRC since September 2023, known as the Clade 1b subclade.

"A person who sought care" in Stockholm "has been diagnosed with mpox caused by the clade I variant. It is the first case caused by clade I to be diagnosed outside the African continent," the agency said in a separate statement.

The person was infected during a visit to "the part of Africa where there is a major outbreak of mpox clade I," state epidemiologist Magnus

Gisslen said in the statement.

The agency added, "The fact that a patient with mpox is treated in the country does not affect the risk to the general population, a risk that the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) currently considers very low."

Vaccine drive

The US Department of Health said on Wednesday it would be "donating 50,000 doses of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved JYNNEOS vaccine to DRC".

"Vaccination will be a critical element of the response to this outbreak," it said in a statement.

Danish drugmaker Bavarian Nordic said it was ready to produce up to 10 million doses of its vaccine targeting mpox by 2025.

The UN health agency declaration on the virus came the day after the African Union's health watchdog declared its own public health emergency over the growing outbreak.

Formerly called monkeypox, the virus was first discovered in humans in 1970 in what is now the DRC.

It 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.

In May 2022, mpox infections surged worldwide, mostly affecting gay

and bisexual men, due to the clade 2b subclade.

The WHO declared a public health emergency which lasted from July 2022 to May 2023.

That outbreak, which has now largely subsided, caused some 140 deaths out of around 90,000 cases.

The clade 1b subclade, which has been surging in the DRC since September 2023, causes more severe disease than clade 2b, with a higher fatality rate.

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