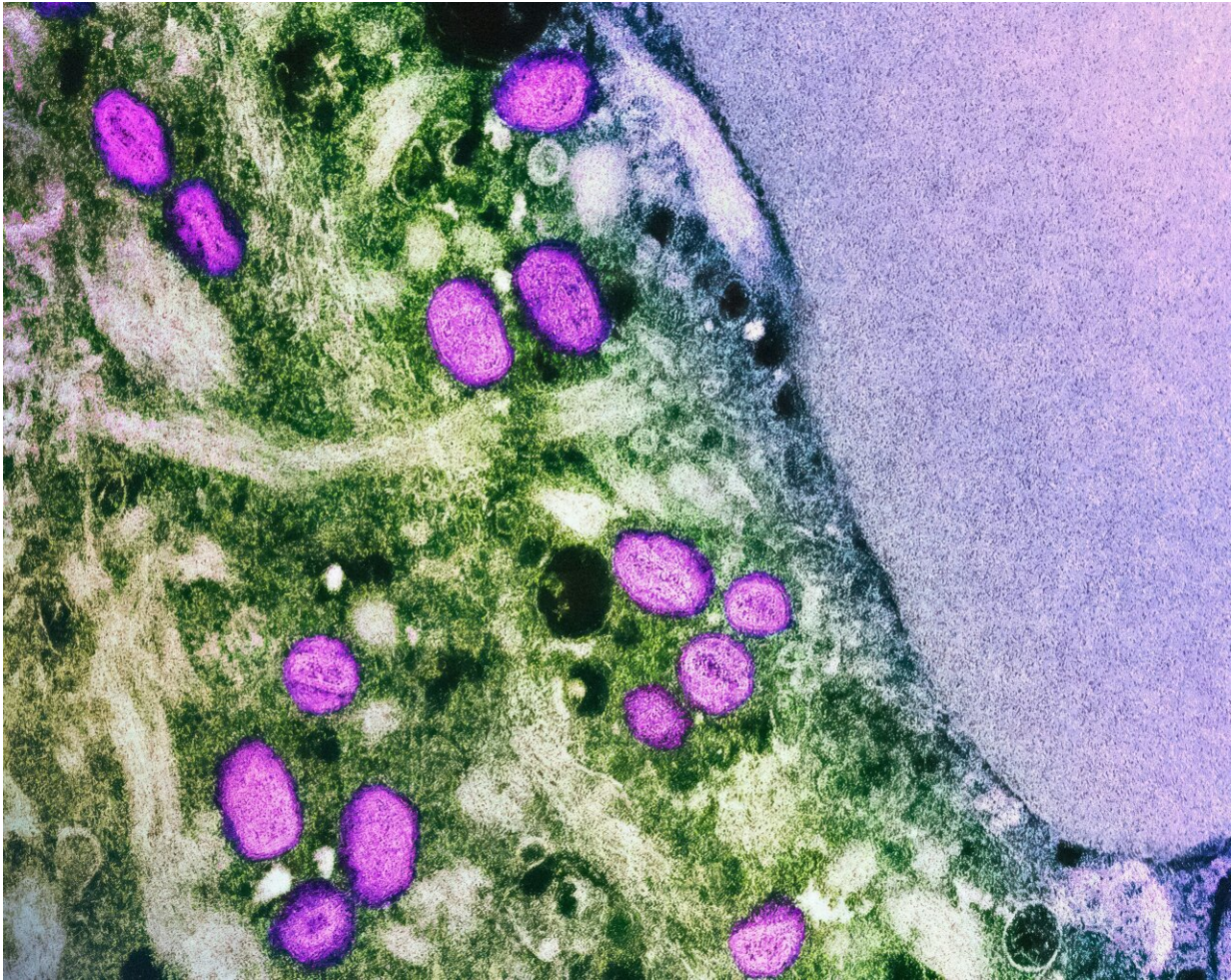


# What we know about the mpox outbreak

September 3 2024

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An mpox outbreak in Africa, driven partly by a new variant that emerged in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has been declared an

international emergency and sparked calls for vaccine donations.

Here is what you need to know.

## **What is mpox?**

The viral illness formerly known as monkeypox was first detected in humans in the DR Congo in 1970.

It spreads through close physical contact with [infected people](#) or animals.

The sometimes deadly disease causes fever, muscle pains and painful skin lesions.

There are two virus subtypes—clade 1 and clade 2.

For decades, clade 1 has been endemic in Central Africa's Congo Basin, while clade 2 has been endemic in parts of West Africa.

## **Global outbreak?**

The virus gained international prominence in May 2022, when clade 2b spread around the world, mostly affecting gay and bisexual men.

In July 2022, the World Health Organization declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)—its highest level of alarm.

Vaccination and awareness drives in many countries helped stem the number of worldwide cases and the WHO lifted that emergency in May 2023.

Around 200 deaths have been reported out of roughly 100,000 cases across 120 countries, according to the WHO.

Many nations are still recording occasional cases of clade 2b, which appears in the main to spread through sexual intercourse.

Previous outbreaks in Africa had mostly started when people came into contact with infected wild animals, for example when eating bushmeat.

## **The new strain?**

The WHO declared another public emergency for mpox in August due to rising cases in Central Africa as well as the emergence of a new variant in the DR Congo.

The new strain, called clade 1b, was first detected among sex workers in eastern DR Congo in September 2023.

In recent months, clade 1b cases have been recorded in nearby Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda—none of which had previously detected mpox.

Single cases of clade 1b have also recently been reported in Sweden and Thailand among people infected while visiting affected African nations.

The WHO has said that more than 18,000 suspected mpox cases and 629 deaths have been recorded in the DR Congo this year.

That figure includes over 5,000 cases and 31 deaths in regions where clade 1b has been spreading.

## **How dangerous?**

Earlier this year, researchers working on the outbreak in eastern DR Congo warned that clade 1b is "the most dangerous strain" of mpox so far.

However research is still underway to discover how clade 1b compares to the original strain.

According to WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris, "available epidemiological data doesn't really suggest that the clade 1b variant causes more severe cases and deaths".

Experts have also urged caution regarding mpox fatality rates, which have been reported as high as 10 percent for clade 1—and 3.6 percent for the eastern DR Congo outbreak.

This is because the DRC deaths have often been in remote regions lacking adequate medical care, and among already sick children or adults suffering from other illnesses such as HIV.

## **Vaccine supply?**

There has been criticism that the vaccines which helped wealthier nations stem their mpox cases during the 2022 outbreak have not been made available to the African countries hardest hit by the disease.

Since the WHO declared a PHEIC in August, the European Union, Japan and the United States, as well as the Danish vaccine manufacturer Bavarian Nordic, have all pledged to donate doses to the affected region.

There are two vaccines used against [mpox](#) in recent years, both originally developed for smallpox—Bavarian Nordic's Jynneos and LC16 made by Japanese company KM Biologics.

The WHO said on Friday that about 230,000 vaccine doses were nearly ready to be dispatched to affected regions, with the first delivery expected within days.

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has called for the continent to obtain 10 million doses.

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Citation: What we know about the mpox outbreak (2024, September 3) retrieved 9 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-09-mpox-outbreak.html>

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