

## **WHO DECLARES MONKEYPOX A GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS**

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As the global COVID pandemic wanes, the World Health Organization has declared a new global health crisis; monkeypox.

A panel of WHO experts met last Thursday but remained deadlocked with nine members against and six in favor of the declaration, failing to come to a decision. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus broke the deadlock, declaring the outbreak a “public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC),” the organization’s highest level warning.

“We have an outbreak that has spread worldwide rapidly, through new modes of transmission, about which we understand too little,” Tedros said. “For all of these reasons, I have decided that the global monkeypox outbreak represents a public health emergency of international concern.”

More than 16,000 cases of monkeypox have been reported across more than 70 countries so far this year, and the number of confirmed infections rose 77% from late June through early July, according to WHO data. Five deaths from the virus have been reported in Africa this year. No deaths have been reported outside Africa so far.

More than 80% of confirmed infections have been in Europe, but the US has reported more than 2,891 monkeypox cases so far across 44 states. States reporting cases have received 370,000 vaccine doses. States reporting cases have received 370,000 vaccine doses.

The disease has clear vectors of transmission, with male-to-male sexual contact accounting for the vast majority of cases. 99% of the cases reported outside Africa are among men, and 98% of the infections are among men who have sex with men, primarily those who have had multiple, recent anonymous, or new sexual partners. The WHO emphasized that stigmatizing members of a community based on sexual orientation should be avoided as it is a “violation of human rights that will undermine the public health response to the outbreak.”

“Although I am declaring a public health emergency of international concern, for the moment, this is an outbreak that is concentrated among men who have sex with men, especially those with multiple sexual partners,” Tedros told a media briefing in Geneva. “Stigma and discrimination can be as dangerous as any virus,” he added. “We seek your strong commitment to uphold human dignity, human rights so that we can control this outbreak,” Tedros said. Caused by a virus, monkeypox causes a painful rash that can spread over the entire body. The last global health

emergency declared by the WHO was the COVID pandemic in January of 2020. Two months later, COVID was declared a pandemic. The declaration does not impose requirements on national governments, serving only as an urgent call for action. Unlike COVID, monkeypox is not new. First discovered in 1958 in captive monkeys used for research in Denmark, the first case of a human infected with the virus was in 1970 in the nation of Zaire, now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Monkeypox is in the same virus family as smallpox, though it causes a milder disease. There are already vaccines and antivirals to prevent and treat the disease it causes, though they are in short supply.

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