

MPOX NOW A GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

Potential for further spread within Africa and beyond is worrying, says WHO head

NICOLA DANIELS

nicola.daniels@inl.co.za



THE World Health Organization (WHO) last night declared the current mpox outbreak a public health emergency of international concern.

A public health emergency of international concern is the highest level of alarm under international health law.

Addressing a media briefing yesterday WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "Last week I announced that I was convening an Emergency Committee under the International Health Regulations to evaluate the upsurge of mpox in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other countries in Africa.

The detection and rapid spread of a new clade of mpox in eastern DRC, its detection in neighbouring countries that had not previously reported mpox, and the potential for further spread within Africa and beyond is very worrying. In addition to other outbreaks of other clades, the Emergency Committee's advice to me, and that of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, which yesterday (Tuesday) declared a public health emergency of regional security, are aligned." Mpox is a viral illness caused by the monkeypox virus, with two distinct clades: Clade I and Clade II.

Common symptoms include a skin rash or mucosal lesions lasting two to four weeks, fever, headache, muscle aches, back pain, low energy and swollen lymph nodes.

The virus can be transmitted to humans through physical contact with

an infectious person, contaminated materials, or infected animals.

The Africa CDC said the decision comes after at least 13 African countries, including previously unaffected nations like Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda, had reported mpox outbreaks.

These countries have confirmed 2 863 cases and 517 deaths for 2024, primarily in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the organisation said.

According to the Africa CDC, suspected cases across the continent have surged past 17 000, a significant increase from 7 146 cases in 2022 and 14 957 cases in 2023.

The South African National Health Department last month said the disease remained under control locally and confirmed 22 mpox cases including 16 recoveries, three deaths and three active cases.

National Health Department spokesperson, Foster Mohale yesterday said South Africa was among participants in an emergency meeting by the WHO, where different countries including South Africa were presenting. "This is a closed meeting for countries to present the state of mpox, to enable the WHO to make (an) informed announcement," Mohale said.

Africa CDC director-general Dr Jean Kaseya emphasised the urgency of swift and decisive action: "We declare this PHECS to mobilise our institutions, our collective will, and our resources to act—swiftly and decisively.

"This empowers us to forge new partnerships, strengthen

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