

# Mpox is a public health emergency of international concern

On August 13, 2024, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) declared the continuing Mpox outbreak in Central Africa a “Public Health Emergency of Continental Security (PHECS),” a declaration that empowered the organization to “lead and coordinate responses to significant health emergencies.”<sup>[1]</sup>

A day later, the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, also declared that the Mpox outbreak “constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).”<sup>[2]</sup>

The global health bodies’ quick responses signify the urgency with which a response is needed. For Africa CDC, it was the first time the centre had made such a declaration since its foundation in 2017.

According to the Africa CDC, the Monkeypox virus has two distinct genetic types or clades: Clade I and Clade II. The symptoms of Mpox include a skin rash/ mucosal lesions, fever, headache, muscle and back pains, lethargy, and swollen lymph nodes. The virus can be transmitted to humans through physical contact with an infectious person, contaminated materials, or infected animals.<sup>[1]</sup>

Mpox outbreaks have been a recurrent phenomenon in the Democratic Republic of Congo for decades. With the increase in cases in July 2022, WHO declared a PHEIC due to the spread of the virus to several countries in Central and East Africa. The WHO stated that the emergency was over in May 2023.<sup>[2]</sup>

This upsurge of cases and potential spread has increased concerns in the Republic of Congo, Angola, Zambia, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic.<sup>[3]</sup> The Ministries of Health in these countries should be on high alert. Although cross-border activities are expected to continue normally, health workers in these areas should have a high level of suspicion.

South Sudan should take all the necessary steps to stop the virus from entering the country by implementing a robust preparedness and readiness plan as soon as possible. The vital funds and other resources should support the recent steps taken by the Ministry of Health.<sup>[4]</sup>

Recent reports of suspected cases of Mpox in South Sudan were found to be negative.

Let us hope it remains that way.

#### References:

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3. CDC Health Alert Network, Mpox caused by human-to-human transmission of Monkey pox virus in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with spread to neighbouring countries, CDC; 7 August 2024.
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*Mpox patient with the characteristic rash on the dorsal surfaces of the hands in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1997 (Credit: CDC Image Lab)*