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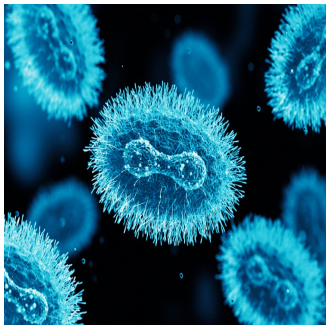
Mpox Outbreak in Africa: A Growing Public Health Concern



The recent declaration of the Mpox (formerly known as monkeypox) outbreak in Africa as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO) has drawn global attention. Originating in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in early 2023, this viral illness has rapidly spread to neighbouring countries, particularly Uganda. The escalation of cases and fatalities has raised significant concerns, especially as infections have been reported beyond Africa, confirming the WHO's fears of a potential global crisis.

Mpox in Congo and Uganda: The Epicentre of the Outbreak

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been the epicentre of the ongoing Mpox outbreak, with over 27,000 cases and more than 1,100 deaths reported since January 2023. The virus has predominantly affected children, with severe complications leading to a high mortality rate. As the outbreak spilled over into Uganda, health authorities were quick to respond. Uganda's first cases were confirmed in July 2023, near its border with Congo, with subsequent cases being reported. The situation in Uganda is particularly concerning as the virus has been identified as the clade 1b strain, which has been linked to severe symptoms and increased transmissibility.

Global Spread and WHO's Declaration

The spread of Mpox beyond Africa has heightened concerns about a global health crisis. In mid-August, a case was confirmed in Sweden, marking the first known instance of the virus spreading outside of Africa during this outbreak. This development aligns with the WHO's decision to declare the outbreak a PHEIC, the highest alert level. This classification underscores the seriousness of the situation and the need for a coordinated international response. With Mpox now confirmed in multiple regions, the global community must remain vigilant to prevent further spread and mitigate the impact of the disease.

Mpox Transmission and Prevention

Mpox is a zoonotic infection, meaning it can spread from animals to humans, but it can also transmit from human to human. The virus primarily spreads through close physical contact, including skin-to-skin contact, respiratory droplets, and contact with contaminated materials. Symptoms of Mpox include fever, headache, muscle aches, and a characteristic rash that progresses through various stages before crusting over. While the disease is often mild, it can be severe or even fatal, particularly in vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems.

Preventing the spread of Mpox requires public health measures, including isolation of infected individuals, use of personal protective equipment, and vaccination for those at high risk. Vaccines originally developed for smallpox have shown effectiveness against Mpox and are being deployed in some regions to curb the outbreak. Additionally, educating the public on the importance of hygiene, avoiding contact with infected individuals, and seeking medical attention promptly if symptoms arise are crucial steps in controlling the spread.

Conclusion

The Mpox outbreak in Africa, particularly in Congo and Uganda, poses a significant public health challenge, both regionally and globally. The WHO's classification of the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern emphasises the need for a coordinated response to prevent further spread. With cases emerging beyond Africa, the global community must act swiftly to contain the virus, protect vulnerable populations, and prevent a potential global health crisis. Public health measures, vaccination efforts, and international cooperation will be essential in combating this outbreak and mitigating its impact.

Source Credit: WHO
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