

Mpox detected in Sweden one day after World Health Organization declares epidemic a Public Health Emergency of International Concern

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On Wednesday, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) as a result of the surging mpox outbreak of the deadlier “clade Ib” viral strain in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and across Africa.

The declaration by WHO follows a similar one issued by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) the previous day, which marked the virus’ spread as a Public Health Emergency of Continental Security. It is the first time the spread of a disease has been categorized as such since the agency was established in 2017.

As part of the WHO announcement, Tedros commented,

The emergence of a new clade of mpox, its rapid spread in eastern DRC, and the reporting of cases in several neighbouring countries are very worrying. On top of outbreaks of other mpox clades in DRC and other countries in Africa, it’s clear that a coordinated international response is needed to stop these outbreaks and save lives.

This year alone, there have been 17,451 cases of mpox in 13 African Union member states, of which 2,822 are confirmed and 14,719 are suspected, which have resulted in 517 deaths, a case fatality rate of 2.95 percent. The total number of cases exceeds the totals for both 2022 and 2023, when mpox previously threatened to spread across the world.

In addition to the high number of cases, the location of new cases spurred on the decision to declare a PHEIC. According to the WHO press release:

In the past month, over 100 laboratory-confirmed cases of clade 1b have been reported in four countries neighbouring the DRC that have not reported mpox before: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. Experts believe the true number of cases to be higher as a large proportion of clinically compatible cases have not been tested.

In addition to the outbreaks in Africa, one case involving the mpox clade I strain was reported in Sweden on Thursday. A statement from the Public Health Agency of Sweden notes, “A person who sought care at Region Stockholm has been diagnosed with mpox caused by the clade I variant.”

The statement then attempted to downplay the dangers involved, claiming that, “the fact that a patient with mpox is treated in the country does not affect the risk to the general population,” a risk which it asserts is “very low.”

In fact, no such claims can be made. Unlike the mpox clade IIb strain which was largely responsible for cases of mpox in 2022 and 2023 and which spreads primarily through sexual contact, the current strain spreads merely through being in close quarters.

While mpox is not generally contagious while a given infected person is not symptomatic, it is still critical to know precisely when they developed the infection to know how many others might have been exposed.

Arguably the most critical piece of information, currently unknown to the public, is how the patient traveled from Africa to Sweden. Did they travel via land, air, sea? In what cities did they lay over? How packed were the cars, buses, trains, ships or planes on which they traveled? Given the immense danger the current strain poses to the health of everyone who catches the disease, not performing mass

contact tracing and testing for the pathogen is criminally irresponsible at best.

As part of the PHEIC declaration, the WHO also announced that it has allocated \$1.45 million for “surveillance, preparedness and response activities” regarding the multi-continent epidemic. It is also asking for an additional \$15 million in donations from its members to fully fund the initial stages of its response to the virus.

Among the most important immediate needs, according to the WHO, is for mpox vaccines to be sent to the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the vast majority of current cases have been detected. Both vaccines currently in use for the virus are approved by the agency, and last week Tedros initiated an Emergency Use Listing in order to bypass any problems distributing the vaccines if a given nation has not yet had its national regulatory bodies approve them.

The unserious response by the Swedish government to the outbreak will, however, likely be mirrored by every other major world power. One of the most devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world’s population is the complete dismantling of public healthcare infrastructure in essentially every country, especially testing and contact tracing to find and isolate infected individuals, cutting vectors of transmission for diseases.

Mpox has also been detected in wastewater in San Francisco. Wastewater has been among the most consistent methods for detecting the presence of COVID-19 throughout the pandemic, and the detection of mpox is extraordinarily alarming. It indicates the real possibility that the virus, possibly the more lethal clade I or IB strains, has crossed the Atlantic.

Rather than stop the spread of deadly viruses, the world’s governments have no interest in addressing the threat of COVID-19 or mpox because it cuts across the financial interests of the corporate and financial interests which these figures represent.

The work of the WHO itself suffers from this pressure. When it ended the PHEIC regarding COVID-19 last year, it was not because the pandemic was over or contained, or that a mass and effective vaccination campaign had succeeded, but due to the diktats of, above all, American capitalism to keep workers on the job to further enrich the financial oligarchs.

That world governments no longer care about public health was further exposed this week when the US provided \$20 billion to Israel to continue its genocidal campaign against the population of Gaza. While Tedros must beg for \$15 million to save lives, Israel is given essentially a blank check for tanks, planes, bullets and bombs to continue its slaughter of a defenseless population.

And the less said the better about figures such as the

fascistic owner of Twitter/X, Elon Musk, who received a \$45 billion pay package from Tesla in June.

The genocide has also made Gazans especially susceptible to diseases that had largely been suppressed or eliminated in the enclave. Since the start of the genocide 10 months ago, the population has had to deal with polio, measles, cholera, scabies, chickenpox, lice, impetigo and various skin diseases because of the squalid conditions. An mpox outbreak among the population would be catastrophic.

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) presidential candidate Joseph Kishore commented on the WHO declaration, writing:

No confidence can be placed in the world’s imperialist powers to act decisively to end this outbreak. The ruling class response to the COVID-19 pandemic, now in its fifth year, has led to the deaths of over 1.4 million Americans and 27 million people worldwide. Hundreds of millions have suffered the consequences of Long COVID. ...

Moreover, as the repeated outbreaks of global infections demonstrate, there can be no national solution. The necessary measures to stop diseases and save lives requires an internationally coordinated response, which is not possible within the framework of the capitalist national-state system. It requires the fight of the international working class for socialism on a world scale.

That is the program which the election campaign of the Socialist Equality Party is fighting for.



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