

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

To: Editors & Health Journalists  
Issued by: Department of Health  
Date: Sunday, 18 August 2024

### **Health Department calls for calm as WHO declares Mpox a public health emergency of international concern**

**Pretoria:** The Department of Health would like to assure members of the public that the current mpox outbreak remains under control in the country, however, that does not mean people should become complacent because we have learned from COVID-19 pandemic that viruses are unpredictable as they mutate from time to time.

The country remains on high alert in case of surge in mpox cases and emergence of new contagious strains. Members of the public are urged to play their part and support the country's response efforts to prevent the spread of mpox by maintaining non-pharmaceutical measures including personal hygiene. The Department is considering a number of pharmaceutical interventions which include additional treatment and vaccine, and the decision will be informed by the epidemiological data at our disposal.

It is important to clarify that both the declarations by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and WHO do not translate into trade and travel restrictions, but serve as a clarion call for member states including South Africa to work together, fast-track approval of mpox vaccine and treatment while maintaining strict safety protocols, and ensure these life-saving vaccines reach the most vulnerable populations in order to prevent further spread of this infectious, but treatable disease, and the loss of lives.

The Department of Health is working with various stakeholders including the WHO Country Office, National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) and Border Management Authority (BMA) to intensify epidemiological and surveillance, contact tracing and health screening activities for case investigation and early detection of new positive cases in the country.

The total number of positive cases recorded in the country as of Sunday, 18 August 2024 stands at 24 including 3 deaths, 19 recoveries and two active cases undergoing home isolation. A total of 12 cases were reported in Gauteng, 11 reported in KwaZulu-Natal and one in the Western Cape.

The Department will keep the public updated on the situation and response efforts, including as and when there are new developments. We encourage businesses and organisations with operations in the affected countries to ensure to put in measures in place to ensure their employees who regularly travel to and from South Africa, are well informed of mpox; and are fit to travel. Travellers experiencing mpox-like symptoms

should seek immediate medical attention and if possible, delay their travel until they are diagnosed or fully recovered in order to prevent possible cross border transmission.

We also urge all people who experience any of the mpox symptoms, with or without international travel history to present themselves to a health facility for clinical observation and confine themselves to one place until their test results are available.

Anyone can contract mpox regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation and race. The current epidemiological data suggests that people living with HIV and men who have sex with men (MSM) are vulnerable to mpox. Others at high risk and vulnerable include those living with chronic medical conditions such as TB and Diabetes.

Some of the common symptoms of mpox include a rash which may last for 2–4 weeks, fever, headache, muscle aches, back pain, low energy and swollen glands (lymph nodes). The painful rash looks like blisters or sores, and can affect the face, palms of the hands, soles of the feet, groin, etc.

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