



“I will heal your wounds...” Jeremiah 30:17

Q&A

Mpox and the Role of Faith Communities

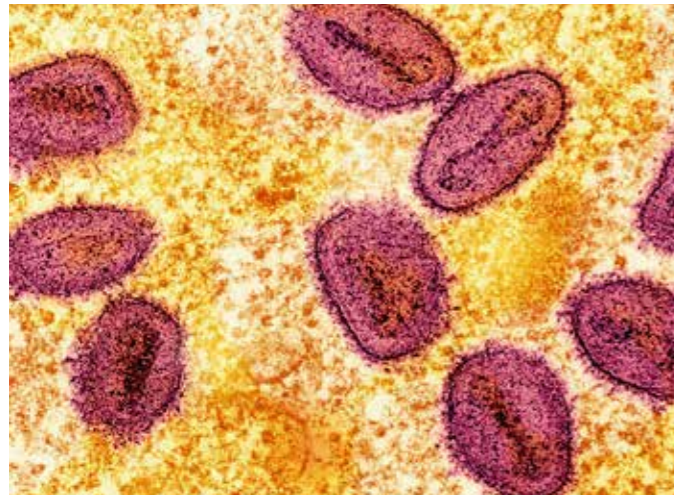


World Council
of Churches

What is Mpox?

Mpox, formerly called Monkey Pox, is a **virus** of zoonotic origin (**transferred from animals to humans**).

For most people, the Mpox virus causes a relatively mild disease characterized by **fever, headaches, rashes, and blisters on the skin**. People with weakened immune systems (such as people with untreated HIV), older people, children, and pregnant women can experience severe illness.



How is Mpox transmitted?

The animals where the Mpox virus is **typically seen**, the natural hosts, include some **rodents** and **primates**. Mpox was initially transmitted to humans while hunting, skinning, or cooking animals.

Human-to-human transmission can occur because of:

- **Exposure to body fluids**, tissue and mucus membrane (The body fluids can include blood, saliva [spit], urine, faeces [stool], semen, and skin [sweat], as well as the fluids in the rectum [back passage], nose and mouth.)
- **Direct skin-to-skin**, such as in a sexual relationship
- **Routine physical contact**, even without intimate contact
- Transmission from a **pregnant woman to the baby** during and after birth

What are the symptoms?



Skin rash or mucosal lesions, which can last 2–4 weeks or more in persons with weakened immune systems. A Mpox rash often starts in the face and spreads over the body, including the mouth, throat, hands, soles of feet, and other body parts that had contact with the virus, including the genitals and anus. The rash starts as a flat sore and develops into a blister filled with liquid, which can cause pain or be itchy.

Fever, headache, muscle aches, back pain, low energy, and swollen lymph nodes.

Mpox symptoms (what the person feels) and signs (what the healthcare worker sees) typically **appear 1 to 21 days after exposure to the virus**, with most cases showing **symptoms within 7 to 14 days**. Mpox can be transmitted until the sores develop new skin. One can have Mpox without developing symptoms.

Is there a cure or treatment?

New **antiviral treatment is available for patients with compromised immunity** in some countries of the global north (developed countries).

There is no cure for Mpox. There is a treatment that aims to manage the rash and pain and prevent complications.

What can you do if you get Mpox?

If possible, **stay home** and in your own room with good ventilation.

Wash hands frequently with soap and hand sanitizer, especially after touching the sores.

Take **over-the-counter medications to manage pain**.

Wear a mask and cover the lesions if you are with other people until the sores heal.

Keep the skin dry and uncovered (when you are alone), **take warm baths** with baking soda for body sores, and use **saltwater rinses** for mouth sores.

Contact your healthcare provider or medical doctor for more advice.

Do not pop the blisters or scratch the sores because it might cause bacterial infections.

Do not shave the areas where you have sores until the scabs have healed or you have new skin.



What to avoid?

Do not stigmatize or blame people, population groups, countries, or continents affected by Mpox.
Do not disseminate rumours, myths, and perceptions.

The current Mpox outbreak

On August 14, 2024, the World Health Organization declared the Mpox outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. This outbreak is caused by the 'clade 1b' strain, which is more transmissible than the strains of the earlier outbreak (2022- 2023).

The **epicentre is in the Democratic Republic of Congo** and it has spread to neighbouring countries, as well as to **Sweden** and **Thailand**. The number of people infected are changing rapidly. You can find the latest figures at https://worldhealthorg.shinyapps.io/mpx_global.



Is there a vaccine?

There are vaccines for Mpox. One is an older smallpox vaccine, which is part of the same virus family. The other is a new third-generation vaccine based on a live, attenuated orthopoxvirus. The World Health Organization **recommends vaccination for the following groups:**

- **Health and care workers** at risk of exposure.
- **People in the same household or close community** of someone who has Mpox, including children.
- **People who have multiple sex partners**, including men who have sex with men, sex workers of any gender, and their clients.

Do not judge people who might have contracted Mpox.

Do not moralize the information about Mpox or any other disease.

What can faith communities do for the Mpox response?

Faith communities have an essential role in the response to Mpox and other outbreaks:

- Use the latest information from trusted sources such as the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health.
- Educate faith communities on Mpox prevention and self-care, vaccine confidence, and no stigma and discrimination, including in sermons and preaching.
- Encourage open discussions about the possibility of having people with Mpox in the faith community and discuss how prevention with self-isolation can happen without stigmatizing people.
- Create trust in your faith community so that affected people feel confident to communicate when they have symptoms and provide information about their contacts who might have been exposed.
- Discuss if there are community members who could be more exposed and how the faith community can support them to prevent Mpox and/or recover from the infection.
- Create a list of medical centres which offer care for Mpox.
- Practice a healing ministry through direct support (provision of food supplies, transport to medical centres, donation of hygiene items, etc.).
- Provide care and spiritual and psychosocial support for those affected and define ways to spiritually and emotionally accompany (remotely) people while they recover.
- Advocate for equitable access to vaccines, testing commodities, and care for countries and most affected communities. Currently, there are very few vaccines available for Africa.
- Continue to advocate for functioning health systems that provide universal health care.
- Promote hand washing or alcohol-based hand sanitizers in places of worship. Regularly disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Preach love and compassion for all people affected by diseases in faith communities and be part of the healing process.

We would love to know if you have more questions or suggestions and if this material was helpful to you. Please send your questions and comments to healthandhealing@wcc-coe.org

