

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists
Issued by: Department of Health
Date: Monday, 27 May 2024

Health Department warns public of increasing Mpox and Flu cases

Pretoria: The Department of Health urges members of the public who experience suspected symptoms of Mpox disease (formerly known as Monkey) to visit their nearest healthcare provider for screening and testing to ensure early diagnosis and effective treatment to prevent further spread of the disease.

The country has recorded the second laboratory-confirmed case of Mpox disease, an infectious disease caused by the monkeypox virus with potential to cause a painful or itchy rash like pimples or blisters. The new patient is the 39-year-old male who was admitted at Addington Hospital in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal without travel history to countries and regions currently experiencing the outbreak of the disease.

The department working closely with the province and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) have activated contact tracing and case finding to identify and assess people who have been in contact with the patient to prevent further transmission, especially at a household and community level. This will also assist to establish if the second case was in contact with the first case confirmed in Gauteng earlier this month.

According to the World Health Organization multi-country outbreak of Mpox, a total of 466 laboratory-confirmed cases of mpox and three deaths from 22 countries were reported globally in March 2024, illustrating that low-level transmission continues across the world.

The most affected regions are the WHO African Region, the European Region, the Region of the Americas, the Western Pacific Region, and the South-East Asia Region. In the African Region, the Democratic Republic of the Congo reports the highest number of confirmed positive cases, which represent just over a tenth of the suspected (clinically compatible) cases and deaths reported.

Stigma and discrimination may prolong a disease outbreak by stopping people from coming forward for information or seeking testing or care, which undermines public health efforts. Thus, we urge the public and communities to support those who tested positive for Mpox to take treatment and those with suspected symptoms to go for screening and testing instead of discriminating against. **For more information about Mpox click [here](#).**

Influenza Season

South Africa is currently experiencing the annual influenza (flu) season which started in the week of 22 April 2024, and a number of flu strains are circulating causing severe health complications in some patients. This has been confused with COVID-19 variant which has been in circulation with low level of transmissibility and severity.

The most commonly detected and circulating influenza subtype and lineage are A(H1N1) pdm09 previously known as “swine flu” because it was causing disease in pigs, followed by influenza B/Victoria and influenza A(H3N2). This is not unusual as influenza A(H1N1) pdm09 has been circulating each season as one of the annual seasonal influenza strains since 2010. Influenza A virus is more severe in adults.

About 8 -10% of patients hospitalised for pneumonia and 25% of patients with flu-like illness (fever and cough) will test positive for influenza during the flu season in South Africa. According to the NICD surveillance data, the numbers of influenza cases and positivity rates are increasing rapidly, but the transmission and impact remain at a moderate level of activity for both outpatient and hospitalised cases. This means that while there is a lot of influenza circulating, it is still within the expected range for a normal influenza season.

Influenza may cause severe illness leading to hospitalisation or possibly death, especially among those who are at risk of severe influenza illness or complications. High-risk groups include pregnant women (including 6 weeks after delivery), individuals living with HIV, those with chronic conditions such as diabetes, lung disease, tuberculosis, heart disease, renal disease, and obesity, the elderly (aged ≥ 65 years) and children <2 years old.

These groups of people are strongly encouraged to receive the influenza vaccine available freely at public health clinics or at a cost from privately healthcare providers and through pharmacies. Ideally the influenza vaccine should be administered prior to the start of the influenza season because it takes about two weeks for antibodies to develop following vaccination, but it is not too late for people to get it protect themselves and their loved ones against these viruses.

Non-pharmaceutical interventions such as covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, enough ventilation, regular handwash with water and soap/sanitiser can help to minimise the spread of the disease. **For the latest influenza updates click [here](#)**

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