

World Health Organization declares Monkeypox a global emergency



Geneva, July 23 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the monkeypox outbreak in more than 70 countries an “emergency of international concern.” The WHO label – a “public health emergency of international concern” – is designed to sound an alarm that a coordinated international response is needed and could unlock funding and global efforts to collaborate on sharing vaccines and treatments.

Governments are advised to raise awareness among doctors and hospitals, take protective measures in suspected cases and educate members of the population on how to protect themselves from infection.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus made the decision to issue the declaration despite a lack of consensus among experts serving on the UN health agency’s emergency committee. It was the

first time the chief of the UN health agency has taken such an action.

Announcing his decision to declare the health emergency during a media briefing in Geneva, Tedros confirmed that the committee had failed to reach a consensus, with nine members against and six in favour of the declaration.

“We have an outbreak that has spread around the world rapidly through new modes of transmission about which we understand too little and which meets the criteria in the international health regulations,” Tedros said on Saturday.

“I know this has not been an easy or straightforward process and that there are divergent views among the members” of the committee, he added. Tedros said there are now more than 16,000 reported cases from 75 countries and territories, and five deaths.

“There are characteristic Monkeypox rashes that [people] should be looking at, particularly if they’re in an elevated risk group and they’ve had sexual relationships or close physical contact with somebody who might be ill,” said Lawrence Gostin, Director of the WHO Center on Global Health Law and Founding O’Neill Chair in Global Health Law at Georgetown University.

“There should be contact tracing...widespread testing and a strategic deployment of vaccines to try and nip this in the bud. But the window for containment of monkeypox is rapidly closing and we fear that this could become endemic in Europe, North America and other parts of the world over the next months,” Gostin told Al Jazeera from Washington, DC.

A global emergency is WHO’s highest level of alert, but the designation does not necessarily mean a disease is particularly transmissible or lethal.

WHO’s emergencies chief, Dr Michael Ryan, said the director-general made the decision to put Monkeypox in that category to ensure the global community takes the current outbreak seriously.

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