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Progress reports

Report by the Director-General

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1. Pursuant to resolution WHA60.1, the Director-General submits this report on the Secretariat's work. At the Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly, Member States noted that variola virus research overseen by WHO had delivered public health benefits during mpox outbreaks, and that research should continue to benefit all peoples.

2. This report summarizes the outcome of the twenty-seventh meeting of the WHO Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research (Geneva, 24–25 November 2025),[1] which considered studies proposed by the two WHO collaborating centres located, respectively, in the Russian Federation and the United States of America. The Secretariat provided an update on ongoing mpox outbreaks for which public health emergencies of international concern had been determined (July 2022–May 2023 and August 2024–September 2025) under the International Health Regulations (2005). From 2022 to 2025, 144 countries had reported 173 902 laboratory-confirmed mpox cases and 477 deaths, including 64 492 cases and 272 deaths in 35 countries in Africa. In 2025, 29 African countries reported 44 582 confirmed cases of 52 974 cases reported globally (84%) and 197 deaths of 215 deaths reported globally (92%). In 2026, the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to report 1000 suspected cases per week compared to 2500 at the peak of the outbreak in early 2025.[2,3]

3. The Advisory Committee was encouraged that provision of mpox vaccines in Africa was facilitated by such measures as publication of the WHO smallpox and mpox vaccines position paper, prequalification and Emergency Use Listing for mpox vaccines, critical bilateral and other vaccine donations to countries in need, and emergency vaccine deployment through the multi-partner Access and Allocation Mechanism. The Secretariat also reported that the International Coordinating Group for mpox vaccine provision would be established by August 2026 to create a global vaccine stockpile and enhance access to countermeasures for mpox outbreak response. The Advisory Committee reviewed research proposals for ongoing evaluation of vaccinia-based vaccines and development of mRNA vaccines for orthopoxvirus diseases and recommended ongoing research for public health benefit.

4. Regarding antiviral therapeutics, the Advisory Committee recalled that three agents had been approved for smallpox or for smallpox, mpox and other orthopoxvirus infections, namely tecovirimat (since 2018 in several jurisdictions), brincidofovir (United States of America in 2021, Canada in 2023) and NIOCH-14 (2022 in the Russian Federation). Due to its mechanism of action, evaluating use of tecovirimat for post-exposure prophylaxis was encouraged by the Advisory Committee, which also noted that studies to develop monoclonal antibody therapeutic agents for smallpox and mpox showed promise. The Advisory Committee recommended continued work to discover and develop antiviral therapeutics against smallpox and mpox.

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[1] Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2026 (accessed 30 April 2026).

[2] Global mpox trends. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2026 (accessed 30 April 2026).

[3] Mpox: Multi-country external situation report No. 62. Geneva: World Health Organization (accessed 2 March 2026).

5. In 2026, WHO continues to provide mpox diagnostic support to countries through provision of polymerase chain reaction kits, genome sequencing of virus strains, and evaluation of rapid diagnostic tests. The Advisory Committee recommended that work to develop rapid diagnostics for smallpox and mpox should continue, limiting to a minimum any use of live variola virus for this purpose.

6. Biosafety inspections[4] of the authorized variola virus repositories took place at the WHO Collaborating Centre for Orthopoxvirus Diagnosis and Repository for Variola Virus Strains and DNA (State Research Centre for Virology and Biotechnology (VECTOR), Koltsovo, Novosibirsk Region, Russian Federation) in November 2025 and at the WHO Collaborating Centre for Smallpox and Other Poxvirus Infections (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, United States of America) in April 2026.

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[4] Biosafety inspection reports. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2025 (accessed 30 April 2026).