

UN denounces racist and homophobic coverage of Monkeypox

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????UNAIDS warns some reporting and commentary on the virus has used stigmatising language that could harm public health.????

United Nations, May 24 (RHC)-- The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has warned that stigmatising language used in the coverage on the Monkeypox virus could jeopardise public health, citing some portrayals of Africans and LGBTI people that “reinforce homophobic and racist stereotypes and exacerbate stigma.”

More than 100 confirmed or suspected cases of Monkeypox virus have been reported so far in nearly 20 countries where the virus is not endemic. Most infections have been reported in Europe, but confirmed and suspected cases have been reported in the Middle East, North America and Australia.

UNAIDS said “a significant proportion” of recent Monkeypox cases have been identified among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men.

But transmission is most likely via close physical contact with a Monkeypox sufferer and could affect anyone, it added, saying some portrayals of Africans and LGBTI people “reinforce homophobic and racist stereotypes and exacerbate stigma.”

“Stigma and blame undermine trust and capacity to respond effectively during outbreaks like this one,” UNAIDS deputy executive director Matthew Kavanagh said.

“Experience shows that stigmatising rhetoric can quickly disable evidence-based response by stoking cycles of fear, driving people away from health services, impeding efforts to identify cases, and encouraging ineffective, punitive measures.”

Monkeypox is usually is a mild virus that can cause fever, headache as well as a distinctive bumpy skin rash, but it can also be severe. The symptoms usually clear up after two to four weeks.

The disease is considered endemic in 11 African nations. There are two main strains: the Congo strain, which is more severe – with up to 10 percent mortality – and the West African strain, which has a death rate of 1 percent of cases.

Kavanagh said UNAIDS appreciated the LGBTI community for having led the way in raising awareness of monkeypox and reiterated that the disease could affect anyone.

“This outbreak highlights the urgent need for leaders to strengthen pandemic prevention, including building stronger community-led capacity and human rights infrastructure to support effective and non-stigmatizing responses to outbreaks,” Kavanagh added.

The WHO on Monday said the Monkeypox outbreaks in non-endemic countries can be contained and human-to-human transmission of the virus stopped. “We want to stop human-to-human transmission. We can do this in the non-endemic countries ... This is a containable situation,” the WHO’s emerging diseases lead Maria Van Kerkhove told a live interaction on the UN health agency’s social media channels.

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