

# NUNAVIK PUBLIC HEALTH NEWSLETTER

# **Call for vigilance - MPOX**

Public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) according to the WHO (August 2024) and recurrence of cases in the Montréal region (Sept.-Oct. 2024)

#### Written by:

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# **Background:**

On August 14, 2024, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency in response to the recurrence of mpox (formerly know as Monkeypox) cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and a growing number of other African countries. While clade 1 mpox is endemic and has been observed in the DRC for several decades, the emergence of clade 1b, a new variant, in the fall of 2023 and its rapid spread to other countries led to the WHO's recent decision. During the previous global outbreak of clade 2, the virus was primarily transmitted through sexual contact. Clade 1b is also spread by sexual contact and other transmission routes, such as close contacts with family members, including children. To date, 3 confirmed cases of clade 1 mpox have been declared outside of the African continent, namely in Sweden, Thailand and India.

Between March 12, 2022 and February 14, 2023, an outbreak of clade 2 mpox occurred in Québec; 527 cases were recorded. Since then, a few sporadic cases have been reported, but with no sustained transmission. On October 8, 2024, the Montréal public health department announced that a new outbreak of clade 2 was currently underway. Notably, of the 25 reported cases of mpox received by the Montréal public health department (DRSP-Mtl) in 2024 thus far, 21 were occurred since mid-August. Clade 2 tends to present as a more benign illness than clade 1 (MSSS, 2023; PHAC, 2024a), but the latter is more virulent, has a higher mortality rate and is more easily transmitted from person to person (INSPQ, 2022). To date, all of the cases identified in Canada by the National Microbiology Laboratory were clade 2.

Much like the outbreak in 2022, clade 2 mpox is at present mostly transmitted by gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM). The clinical manifestations of recent cases are similar to those observed during the clade 2 outbreak in 2022-2023, with vaccinated individuals being less symptomatic than the unvaccinated. The means of transmission is still direct contact of the skin or mucous membranes with lesions or biological fluids from an infected person during sexual contact. The majority of cases became infected locally, i.e., in Montréal; only one case appears to have acquired the virus abroad.

It bears noting that mpox <u>prevention and control measures</u> are the same for clade 1 and clade 2; this is also true for the recommendations issued and the criteria governing vaccination eligibility.

## **Recommendations:**

- 1. Evaluate and ensure that persons presenting with one or more lesions of the skin or mucous membranes suggestive of mpox are taken in charge.
  - Consider a possible mpox diagnosis among persons with <u>symptoms compatible with the virus</u>, even if they have received one or two doses of the vaccine against mpox, for the vaccine does not offer full (100%) protection.



- Consider other common etiology, like herpes simplex virus, syphilis, varicella-zoster virus or lymphogranuloma venereum disease.
- Remain especially vigilant when examining a person who has returned from a trip to an <u>endemic zone or a country</u> with documented reports of the sustained transmission of clade 1 mpox.
- For clinical support, contact the on-call infectious diseases physician at the MUHC (514 934-1934).
- Evaluate and perform analysis of persons who meet the <u>definition of a suspect case</u> of mpox by carrying out the required samplings or specimen collection to confirm a diagnosis.
  - Refer to the <u>Guide des services du Laboratoire de santé publique du Québec</u> (in French only) to obtain further details on the samplings, specimens and analysis required when attempting to identify the presence of this infectious agent. Contact the laboratory for instructions on how to safely ship specimens.
  - If samples have been collected, let the on-call infectious disease physician at the MUHC knows so that they can be processed on a priority basis.
- Identify and assess the persons who are symptomatic, known cases and contacts as per the relevant recommendations on the MSSS Web page <a href="Mpox (variole simienne">Mpox (variole simienne</a>) (in French only).
- 2. Take the necessary precautions when conducting clinical evaluations of persons presenting lesions of the skin or mucous membranes suggestive of mpox.
  - When persons presenting symptoms suggestive of mpox consult a medical professional in a clinical setting, they should be asked to cover their lesions (with clothing or bandages), perform hands hygiene and wear a medical-grade mask.
  - Refer to the recommendations of the committee on nosocomial infections (CINQ) of the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ) regarding infection prevention and control measures in healthcare settings.
- 3. Recommend vaccination (pre- and post-exposure) to anyone who meet the relevant criteria in the Québec Immunization Protocol (PIQ).
  - Recommend a full primary vaccination (2 doses, at least 28 days apart) as per <u>PIQ</u> directives. While vaccinated persons may still develop an infection, they are usually less symptomatic than the unvaccinated.
  - Persons considered as being at risk of contracting mpox, who are not adequately immunized, are urged to get vaccinated.

Report any infection that corresponds to the definition of a <u>suspect case</u> to the Department of Public Health as per the instructions below.

## All cases of mpox must be reported to Public Health authorities by one of the following means:

- Form AS-770, that can be filled out and submitted either by:
  - e-mail, at <u>mado-declarations.rr17@ssss.gouv.qc.ca</u> **OR**
  - by fax, at 1 866 867-8026.
- At night, on weekends and on statutory holidays, the report must also be made by telephone, to the Infectious diseases physician on call, at 1 855 964-2244 or 1 819 299-2990.

These contact details are solely for health professionals and may not be shared with the public.