

# Addressing Mpox & HIV among African Sex Workers

**Mbulawa Mugabe & Gang Sun & Coceka Nogoduka**  
HIV and Pandemics, UNAIDS

**05 November 2024**

# The nexus between HIV and Mpox

- Most reports of mpox during the global outbreak in 2022 involved mild or moderate symptoms. However, people living with HIV were disproportionately affected, accounting for up to 50% of cases in some cohorts<sup>1</sup>.
- According to study findings presented at the 12th International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Science, Although people living with HIV are not more likely to be hospitalized with severe mpox, unless they have advanced immune suppression<sup>2</sup>. Latest studies presented at CROI 2023 reported that low CD4 count, and detectable viral load were linked to more severe mpox outcomes<sup>3</sup>.
- 67% of mpox cases from RSA had underlying conditions, with unmanaged or only recently diagnosed HIV infection and advanced HIV disease (AHD), and one had diabetes<sup>4</sup>.
- The emergence of mpox as an opportunistic infection highlights the need for comprehensive strategies for HIV testing, prevention, linkage to care, and treatment services to prevent HIV infection or disease progression that will reduce risk for severe mpox and mitigate its impact
- Although current evidence suggests that people with HIV who are getting antiretroviral medication and have healthy CD4 cell counts are not at elevated risk for most infections, including opportunistic infections like mpox. new cases are still expected to be discovered, especially in low-income countries with limited access to diagnosis, treatment, and prevention, and where a large percentage of the mpox-infected population also has advanced HIV infection. Thus, further research is always needed to determine the best way to treat mpox in immunocompromised people. Solidarity with SWs

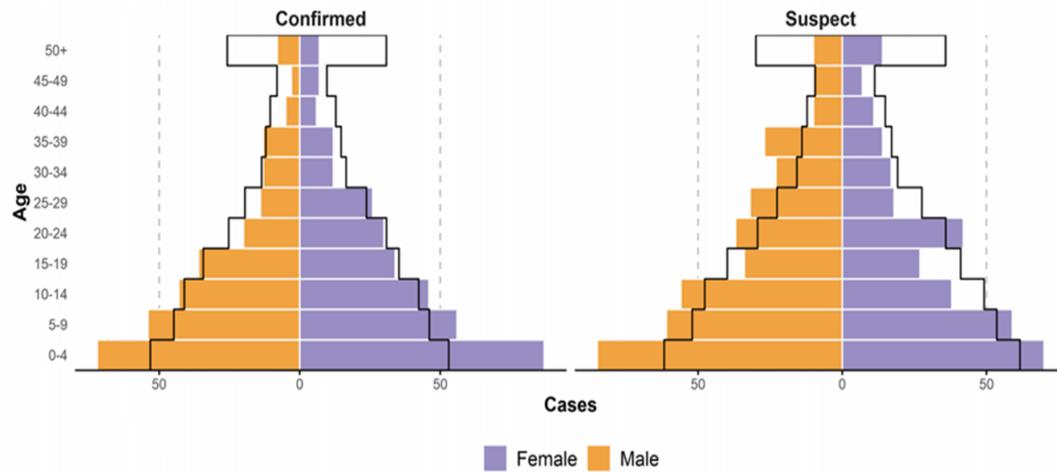
1. Saldana CS, Kelley CF, Aldred BM, Cantos VD. Mpox and HIV: a Narrative Review. Curr HIV/AIDS Rep. 2023 Aug;20(4):261-269. doi: 10.1007/s11904-023-00661-1. Epub 2023 May 13.
2. Liz Highleyman (2023). People with HIV are not at greater risk for severe mpox unless they are immunosuppressed. AIDSmap, 1 August 2023. Available: <https://www.aidsmap.com/news/aug-2023/people-hiv-are-not-greater-risk-severe-mpox-unless-they-are-immunosuppressed>
3. CROI 2023: Severe mpox outcomes with a low CD4 count and detectable viral load: a new AIDS-defining condition? 10 March 2023. Available: <https://i-base.info/hfb/44839>
4. World Health Organization (9 July 2024). Disease Outbreak News; Mpox (monkeypox) in South Africa. Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2024-DON525>



# Age-Sex Pyramids for Mpox & HIV - DRC

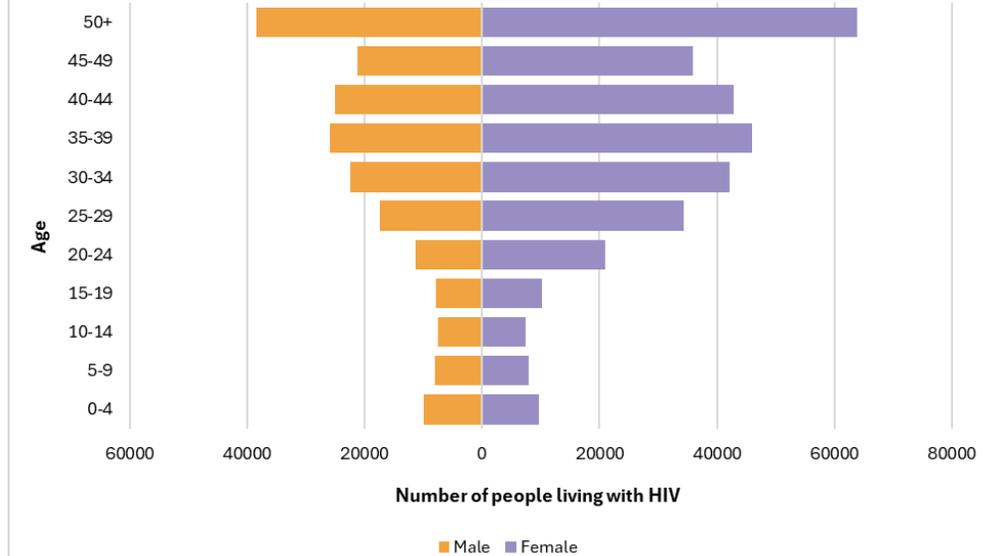
## Age-Sex Pyramid for Mpox in DRC

Recent data (09 Sep - 20 Oct)



## Age-Sex Pyramid for HIV in DRC

Age distribution of people living with HIV, DRC, 2023



# Mpox impact on Key & Vulnerable Populations

Some communities at risk and/or vulnerable to HIV may be at higher risk of infection or vulnerable to severe outcomes if exposed to mpox. These include children, adolescents, women, PLHIV and KP including sex workers, gay men and other men who have sex with men transgender people and the sexual networks of these groups, people in prisons and other closed settings, refugees and internally displaced populations.

Epidemiological evidence show that 51% (13,769/26,992) of confirmed cases of Mpox have HIV, among those whose HIV status were known<sup>1</sup>; mainly because HIV, STIs, and Mpox can be transmitted through sexual contact<sup>2</sup>

Children are particularly vulnerable to the new strain of mpox virus. The most recent data shows that about two-thirds of infections in the DRC – which currently has about 90% of reported cases - are in people under the age of 15 with more than 321 children dying<sup>3</sup>, in Burundi 62.9% of confirmed cases are under the age of 19<sup>4</sup>, and in Uganda 12.5% mpox cases are children<sup>5</sup>.

The impact of mpox is not gender neutral; women and girls in humanitarian setting are disproportionately affected due to overcrowded living situations, subjected to sexual violence and subjugation of women and care-giving role for those that are infected.

Across the most impacted countries, wide-spread malnutrition, crowded living conditions, the presence of other infectious diseases, and limited access to healthcare make the spread of mpox a perilous situation for children.

1. WHO, 2024. Multi-country outbreak of mpox, External situation report#34- 28. Available: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/multi-country-outbreak-of-mpox--external-situation-report-34--28-june-2024>
2. León-Figueroa, D.A.; Barboza, J.J.; Saldaña-Cumpa, H.M.; Moreno-Ramos, E.; Bonilla-Aldana, D.K.; Valladares-Garrido, M.J.; Sah, R.; Rodriguez-Morales, A.J. Detection of Monkeypox Virus According to The Collection Site of Samples from Confirmed Cases: A Systematic Review. Trop. Med. Infect. Dis. 2023, 8, 4
3. WHO African Region Mpox Bulletin #10 - 27 October 2024. Available: <https://www.afro.who.int/publications/regional-mpox-bulletin-27-october-2024>
4. Lisa Schlein (2024). Mpox spreads at alarming rate among children in Burundi, VOA News, 20 September 2024. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/mpox-spreads-at-alarming-rate-among-children-in-burundi/7792425.html>
5. WHO, 2024. Multi-country outbreak of mpox, External situation report#42. Available: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/multi-country-outbreak-of-mpox--external-situation-report-42--31-October-2024>

# Mpox, HIV & Sex Workers

During pandemics, people who are already stigmatised and discriminated against can face a heightened human rights violations from state actors and the wider community.

These risks are even greater in the current context of a well-resourced anti-rights movement that is organising against LGBTQ+ people and SRHR.

Sex work may increase risk of mpox infection – as mpox can be spread through sexual activity and close, skin-to-skin contact, and less commonly through touching clothes, linens, sex toys, or fetish gear used by someone with mpox<sup>1</sup>.

# How the Mpox Response could be leverage from HIV Response

Mpox's present echoes of HIV's past—it's a disease that can potentially affect everyone but disproportionately affect specific community.

Stigma associated with mpox can adversely affect prevention and treatment, with people less likely to disclose symptoms or seek care—they may even hide their condition for fear of being diagnosed.

As a result of the 2022 global emergency and lessons learned from the HIV/AIDS pandemic, public health officials are better equipped to build coordinated messaging and meet patients where they are.

The challenge with both diseases is how to get information to already stigmatized communities in a timely manner to halt transmission without exacerbating stigma

# Principles at the core of the HIV response that are important for Mpox Response:



# UNAIDS HIV and Mpox Information and Guidance Note

- ***The purpose of the Information/Guidance Note*** is to provide the Joint Programme with guidance on engaging and supporting national responses to Mpox.
- The intersectionality between Mpox and HIV provides a window to act on faltering aspects of the HIV response.
- It is an opportunity to leverage lessons from the HIV response to assist countries in tackling the Mpox outbreak.
- The guidance inputs from Co-sponsors – it is a Joint Programme guidance.
- The guidance note was shared both internally and externally, with development partners and donors
- It highlights the support that UNAIDS, the joint programme can provide in the response to Mpox outbreak and the impact of Mpox on PLHIV.
- PEPFAR, GFATM, the UNAIDS Co-sponsors - particularly WHO, UNICEF and UNDP, etc, are supporting the national mpox response.

# UNAIDS support to the national response to mpox

The UNAIDS Joint Teams are working on integrating mpox into HIV / STIs programmes, in the following ways:

- A) Advocating and supporting engagement and participation of communities;**
- B) Promoting equitable access to diagnosis, vaccination and treatment services;**
- C) Campaigning for sustainable supply of affordable mpox products;**
- D) Combating stigma and discrimination to safeguard human rights and ethical mpox approaches; and**
- E) Improving health systems, including improved surveillance, human resources for health, laboratory and supply mechanism and sustained financing.**

# ACDC / WHO Afro Africa Continental Mpox Response Plan

- To respond to the Mpox outbreak, a coordinated, continentwide Mpox Continental Preparedness and Response Plan for Africa response was developed and co-led by Africa CDC and WHO, in close collaboration with global partners including UNAIDS. The plan has a unified incident management team, plan, budget, and monitoring framework.
- UNAIDS prioritized the **centralities of communities** (PLHIV and affected communities) and **whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach (multi-sectoral coordination and governance), Continuity of services, and service integration including surveillance.**
- UNAIDS are prioritizing to contribute to the African Continental Mpox Response Plan as follows:
  - ✓ Advocating and supporting community-led and community-based efforts in the mpox response including RCCE
  - ✓ Advocate for the specific service needs for people living with and/or at risk of HIV including those who are unaware of their HIV status, and
  - ✓ Ensure a human right based and ethical response to mpox without stigma and discrimination

# Conclusion

People who have a compromised immune system are more susceptible to infections like mpox. This includes people living with undiagnosed, untreated, or advanced HIV – **RESPONDING TO Mpox is an opportunity to strengthen HIV response areas that are faltering**

Lessons learnt from HIV response must be leveraged from the HIV response to help countries respond to mpox.

Special attention to service SW community (be part of the response planning elements, community mobilization through community-led response on risk, prevention, where to get services and social protection packages sensitive to SW community)

**THANK YOU**