

Recommendations for ethical monkeypox (mpox) surveillance

Epidemiological surveillance is key to guide an effective and equitable response to mpox that continuously adapts to the needs of populations. Surveillance should always be conducted in a rigorous, respectful, and responsible way, ensuring risks to persons are minimized and generating the collaboration of all involved parties.

Currently, the mpox outbreak predominantly affects gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men. mpox ethical surveillance should be sensitive to the risks for this key population and guide a targeted response to the outbreak.

Ethical mpox surveillance requires:

- **Risk minimization.** Surveillance entails the risks of discrimination and stigmatization. In jurisdictions where the behavior of any group in the key population is criminalized, there is an additional risk of punitive actions. Fear of loss of confidentiality and the harms it involves may deter persons from the key population from having contact with the health system; e.g., they may avoid seeking information or medical care, and contributing to public health measures such as contact tracing. To minimize risks, health authorities should engage society (e.g., through community leaders; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex [LGBTI] groups; and groups of persons living with HIV), design careful communication strategies, and modify any practice that may criminalize, discriminate or stigmatize persons in the key population.
- **Responsible data management.** Public health professionals should ensure the strict protection of the confidentiality of the information and the identities of affected persons and their contacts. The population must be explicitly informed about this protection. It should be stressed that law enforcement and other service providers will not receive any information about those who may be affected by mpox or at risk to contract it.
- **Informing the public.** Health authorities have the responsibility to inform the public about ongoing surveillance efforts, their role controlling the spread of mpox and protecting the health of the population, and their commitment to conducting these surveillance efforts in a rigorous, respectful, non-discriminatory, and responsible way. This information is key to promoting trust and cooperation with the measures that are needed for an effective mpox response.
- **Fostering the collaboration of the key population.** A respectful treatment of the population entails explaining the importance of its contribution to surveillance efforts, along with clarifying that the data collected will only be used for health purposes and handled confidentially. If the necessary protections are in place, the population has the ethical responsibility of cooperating with surveillance efforts and

teaming up with health authorities and health personnel to stop the spread of mpox; e.g., through their cooperation with contact tracing. Note that an ethical obligation does not imply a legal mandate.

- **Using data to inform the response.** Ethical surveillance requires that data collected are analyzed and used in a timely manner to promote and protect people’s health and guide the response to the outbreak: to prevent mpox transmission, improve health care delivery, trace contacts and offer care as needed, and, in general, to adapt the response to the specific needs of affected populations. Measures must be taken throughout to avoid stigma and any form of discrimination.
- **Sharing data rapidly.** All parties involved in mpox surveillance share data rapidly. Rapidly sharing data of the best possible quality is key to informing decision-making processes that are capable of effectively protecting the population’s health. Given the international dimension of the mpox emergency, data should also be shared internationally.

Bibliography

World Health Organization. WHO guidelines on ethical issues in public health surveillance. Geneva: WHO; 2017. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-guidelines-on-ethical-issues-in-public-health-surveillance>

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