

Letter to the Editor

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Monkeypox: A Rising Health Concern in Pakistan and Wake-Up Call for the Government

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The World Health Organization (WHO) Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared monkeypox spread “a public health emergency of international concern,” on July 23, 2022, amid rising infection rates worldwide.¹ The current outbreak affecting many countries at once is not typical of previous outbreaks and can impact the ongoing management against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.² The monkeypox virus spread in populations of close contact and travelled internally.³ The Minister for National Health Services (NHS), Abdul Qadir Patel, issued a directive to all hospitals, in response to the WHO’s declaration of the monkeypox virus as a global health emergency, to take the appropriate action, alerted all the provincial governments to keep an eye out for any suspected case of monkeypox, and ordered the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) (a pandemic response institution) to ensure ongoing surveillance of both COVID-19 infections and the monkeypox cases in the nation.^{4,5}

The increased number of human monkeypox cases indicate the importance of educating the general population regarding prevention, early detection, quick response, and management from health care workers. The same proactive measures could be employed by relevant health authorities to avoid a monkeypox/COVID-like outbreak in Pakistan. Pakistan being a third world country and in the middle of the ongoing economic crisis doesn’t have screening capacity for the early detection of the disease, so the attention should be given to inform the general community and to take the necessary precautionary measures to eliminate the risk. The responsibility lies on the shoulders of the health care workers in terms of quick response and management, but this can only be possible if they have adequate knowledge about the disease. In a health care setting, when dealing with a rash that is undiagnosed or has not previously been diagnosed, it is critically important for a health worker to use all the basic precautions along with personal protective equipment, to avoid exposure to the virus.²

After the devastating, de-globalization process caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the monkeypox outbreak should be a major concern in Pakistan, as a subsequent monkeypox outbreak can be catastrophic and can lead to a global economic crisis.⁶ Pakistan shares borders with China and India, who have already confirmed cases of monkeypox. China is involved in the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor and other trade projects in Pakistan. We have many students studying in China. Encountering another pandemic will lead to a devastating situation for the economy, and our health care system is not strong enough to bear the marks of an emergency for the masses. Moreover, a flood and other natural disasters have propelled people for mass displacement, and they are living in community campuses. This situation may ignite the spread of monkeypox along with other communicable diseases. This may lead to a further decline in the living conditions of the public in a developing country. The Government of Pakistan and international community should intervene in this situation and help the refugees maintain better living. Health care workers and the public should be educated to deal with any emergency. Another pandemic could cause devastation to the health care system and economy of the country. To ensure disaster preparedness in the future, there should be a wide educational plan implemented for health care workers regarding disease symptoms and treatment plan for all affected persons.⁶ The public should be educated on how to control the spread of infection. Some countries are recommending vaccination for persons who are at risk of monkeypox infection.² Isolation is recommended for infected persons until all skin lesions have been treated and are not contagious, to prevent the transmission of infection.⁷ According to the WHO, mass vaccination is not yet needed, and the outbreak can be controlled through targeted vaccination with vaccines from the smallpox stockpile, including other public health measures such as quarantine and isolation.³

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