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As Questions Swirl Around Monkeypox Origins and Risk, Vaccine Makers Set Sights on Profits

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As an unprecedented outbreak of monkeypox spreads throughout the west, questions continue to swirl around the origin of the outbreak, the risk it poses to the public and the measures that may or may not be required to contain the virus.

Some also wondered how unexpected the outbreak was after learning about a March 2021 tabletop simulation of a hypothetical deadly outbreak of monkeypox predicted to occur in May 2022.

The Nuclear Threat Initiative and the Munich Security Conference — entities closely connected to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security — conducted the tabletop exercise.

Some analysts suggested the outbreak may have resulted from gain-of-function research or similar experiments involving the virus, while others floated the theory that malign actors, perhaps related to the conflict in Ukraine, intentionally released the virus.

Meanwhile, politicians and public health officials are delivering mixed and confusing messages to the public about the level of risk, while pharmaceutical companies are preparing to introduce monkeypox vaccines.

WHO responds with emergency meeting — just prior to its World Health Assembly

The World Health Organization (WHO) said it has considered monkeypox a "priority pathogen" for several years. Nevertheless, the new outbreak led the agency on May 20 to hold an emergency meeting of its Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Infectious Hazards with Pandemic and Endemic Potential (STAG-IH) to discuss monkeypox.

STAG-IH, comprised of experts and scientists from around the world and chaired by David

Heymann, professor of epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, advises the WHO on infection risks that could threaten global public health.

STAG-IH does not have the authority to declare a public health emergency of international concern — the WHO's highest form of alert — which is currently active in relation to COVID-19.

The WHO convened the emergency meeting even though the organization was already set to meet for its World Health Assembly May 22-28 in Geneva, Switzerland — where members discussed proposed amendments to the existing International Health Regulations 2005, and where WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was re-elected without opposition to a second five-year term.

The WEF also held its annual meeting May 22-26 — in Davos, Switzerland, not far from Geneva.

Monkeypox response described as 'gaslighting'

Health officials and politicians are responding to the sudden spread of monkeypox with mixed messages.

WHO Europe regional director Dr. Hans Kluge recently expressed concerns about transmission at "mass gatherings, festivals, and parties."

President Biden also shared concerns, stating that "it is something that everybody should be concerned about … it is a concern in the sense that if it were to spread, it's consequential."

And the U.K.'s National Health Service issued an advisory recommending people "only eat meat that has been cooked thoroughly."

However, other public health professionals said the risk to the public is low, as is the likelihood the epidemic will last very long.

In what has been described by scientist and author James Lyons-Weiler as an example of gaslighting, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advised the public not to be concerned over the spread of monkeypox, contradicting President Biden's warning.

An article in the Daily Mail delivered its own mixed messages by first warning, in capital letters, about a possible "hypermutated" monkeypox virus, then quoting Dr. Rosamund Lewis, who heads the smallpox secretariat on the WHO's emergencies program, who said, "Despite suggestions that the virus may have evolved, experts have warned there is no evidence it has done so."

Despite the fact that the WHO has not declared any kind of public health emergency related to the spread of monkeypox outside of Africa, various countries have begun enacting their own measures in response to the outbreak.

Public health authorities in Belgium announced May 20 that a compulsory 21-day quarantine will be imposed for monkeypox patients, U.K. health authorities urged "high risk" contacts of monkeypox cases to self-isolate and to avoid children for 21 days, and Greece and other countries are considering similar measures.

The Belgian Institute of Tropical Medicine announced it is conducting its own monkeypox PCR tests.

Smallpox outbreak: a new windfall for vaccine manufacturers and Big Pharma?

In response to the monkeypox outbreak, the Biden administration placed a $119 million order for smallpox vaccines from Bavarian Nordic, the manufacturer of JYNNEOS (also known as Imvamune and Imvanex), a smallpox vaccine also licensed to treat monkeypox.

The purchase includes a $180 million option for the purchase of future doses, bringing the combined total of the order to 13 million doses if the option is exercised.

According to Fortune:

> "The order will convert existing smallpox vaccines, which are also effective against monkeypox, into freeze-dried versions, which have a longer shelf life. The converted vaccines will be manufactured in 2023 and 2024, the company says.
>
> "Bavarian Nordic has worked with the U.S. government since 2003 to develop, manufacture and supply smallpox vaccines. To date, it says, it has supplied nearly 30 million doses to the Department of Health and Human Services."

The U.K. ordered more than 20,000 doses of JYNNEOS, while the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control reportedly is set to recommend a monkeypox vaccine plan for EU member states.

Existing smallpox vaccines reportedly are up to 85% effective against monkeypox. With the recent outbreak, health authorities in countries such as the U.K. have begun administering the smallpox vaccine to healthcare workers and others who may have been exposed to monkeypox.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2019 approved the JYNNEOS smallpox vaccine, which was developed in conjunction with U.S. Army scientists.

After JYNNEOS received FDA approval, Dr. Peter Marks, director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, said:

> "[A]lthough naturally occurring smallpox disease is no longer a global threat, the intentional release of this highly contagious virus could have a devastating effect.
>
> "Jynneos will be available for those determined to be at high risk of either smallpox or monkeypox infection.
>
> "This vaccine is also part of the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), the nation's largest supply of potentially life-saving pharmaceuticals and medical supplies for use in a public health emergency that is severe enough to cause local supplies to be depleted."

Dr. Anthony Fauci had a hand in the development of JYNNEOS, with accompanying controversy, as highlighted in 2009:

> "Fauci gave about $100 million each to Bavarian Nordic and Acambis for research on a smallpox vaccine in preparation for a BioShield contract to be awarded in 2006.
>
> "Some observers have said that Fauci is 'overstepping his bounds,' [The Wall Street] Journal reports."

A study published in February 2022 in the PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases journal, "initiated and funded by Bavarian Nordic" and co-authored by employees of the company, states:

> "The appearance of outbreaks beyond Africa highlights the global relevance of the disease.
>
> "Increased surveillance and detection of monkeypox cases are essential tools for understanding the continuously changing epidemiology of this resurging disease.
>
> "Overall, monkeypox is gradually evolving to become of global relevance."

Bavarian Nordic isn't the only drugmaker focused on monkeypox. On May 19, the FDA approvedan additional drug, an intravenous version of TPOXX (tecovirimat) for the treatment of monkeypox.

TPOXX is produced by SIGA, described by Bloomberg as "a biological warfare defense firm."

According to SIGA, "Funding and technical support for this work is provided by the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), under the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)."

As reported by The Gateway Pundit:

> "TPOXX has been available for use to treat smallpox for several years, but it was only available in pill form.
>
> "The new version of TPOXX will be delivered directly into the bloodstream via injection and also reportedly works for treating monkeypox."

The previous oral formulation of TPOXX was approved by the FDA in July 2018. That same year, SIGA signed a $629 million contract with BARDA for the inclusion of smallpox drugs in the Strategic National Stockpile.

SIGA reached a similar agreement with Canadian authorities in December 2021, less than a month after Bill Gates warned of the risk of a bioterror attack.

In June 2019, SIGA signed an international promotion agreement with Meridian Medical Technologies, a company owned by Pfizer.

Recent developments sent the stocks of SIGA and Bavarian Nordic soaring. SIGA's stock, which previously peaked in November 2021, rose soon after Gates' pronouncements regarding the possibility of an intentional release of smallpox.

In a recent article, investigative journalist Whitney Webb highlighted the potentially troubling track record of SIGA and another smallpox vaccine manufacturer, Emergent

Biosolutions, including:

- Close ties to Jeffrey Epstein and the Democratic Party.
- "Outrageous" no-bid federal contracts to SIGA for the procurement of smallpox drugs.
- "Troubling ties" to the 2001 anthrax attacks.
- "Serious deficiencies" at a manufacturing plant of a smallpox vaccine producer, Emergent Biosolutions, that also produced COVID-19 vaccines.

Webb also discovered a direct link between Emergent Biosolutions, the Strategic National Stockpile, the anthrax attacks of 2001, the Dark Winter simulation and Bavarian Nordic — via Robert Kadlec, who served as the top bioterror advisor to the Pentagon in the weeks leading up to the 2001 anthrax attacks.

Kadlec participated in the June 2001 Dark Winter simulation of an anthrax attack, helped establish the Strategic National Stockpile, and has directly advised Emergent Biosolutions and Bavarian Nordic.

New players also are jostling for position in light of the monkeypox outbreak, including a familiar face: COVID-19 vaccine manufacturer Moderna, which recently announced it is testing potential monkeypox vaccines.

Confusion over who — or what — to blame for the monkeypox outbreak

Analyst Paul Craig Roberts recently wrote, "No one has explained why and how monkeypox, a problem in a small area of Africa, suddenly appeared all at once all over the Western world," asking if we are about to experience another fear campaign, or something even worse.

The questions posited by Roberts point to the broader confusion, at least from what is evident through publicly available information, as to the origin of the monkeypox outbreak and how it is spreading.

Many scientists reportedly are "baffled" by the "unprecedented" spread of monkeypox outside of Africa and find its spread in North America and Europe to be "perplexing."

This may remind some of the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, which was said to have emerged in Botswana and South Africa without, apparently, heavily impacting those countries.

Oyewale Tomori, a virologist and former president of the Nigerian Academy of Science who currently serves on various WHO advisory committees, was quoted as saying:

> "I'm stunned by this. Every day I wake up and there are more countries infected … [t]his is not the kind of spread we've seen in West Africa, so there may be something new happening in the West."

Dr. Hans Kluge, the WHO's Europe director, characterized the situation as "atypical."

"We've never seen anything like what's happening in Europe," said Christian Happi, director of the African Centre of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Diseases.

Happi also suggested the cessation of smallpox vaccination campaigns in 1980, when the disease was declared eradicated, may be contributing to the spread of monkeypox, as no immunity against smallpox or monkeypox would exist in the population.

This view was mirrored recently in an analysis by Jason Gale of Bloomberg, and picked up by the Washington Post. Gale argued that the eradication of smallpox "led to the end of a global vaccination program that provided protection against other poxviruses [including] monkeypox."

Others argued the low level of incidence of smallpox makes vaccination against it more of a risk than a benefit.

Debates appear to be ongoing in the scientific community as to whether monkeypox is now being sexually transmitted.

Tomori noted sexual transmission has not been observed in Nigeria, but also that viruses not previously known to transmit via sexual contact, such as Ebola, were later proven to do so.

Alessio D'Amato, health commissioner of the Lazio region in Italy, said it was too early to say if monkeypox has morphed into a sexually transmitted disease, while Stuart Neil, professor of virology at King's College London, said, "The idea that there's some sort of sexual transmission in this, I think, is a little bit of a stretch."

Neil Mabbott, personal chair of immunopathology at the University of Edinburgh's Roslin Institute, argued the spread of monkeypox among sexual partners is likely due to close physical proximity rather than sexual contact per se.

However, David Heymann, an infectious disease specialist at the WHO who led the organization's recent emergency meeting on monkeypox, suggested the virus entered the population as a "sexual form, as a genital form, and is being spread as are sexually transmitted infections."

This appears to be aligned with the WHO's current official view that sexual contact is responsible for the spread of monkeypox, not as a sexually transmitted disease but by virtue of close physical contact.

Is the current monkeypox outbreak related to gain-of-function research?

The term "gain-of-function" (GoF) research over the past two years entered mainstream discourse following speculation the SARS-CoV-2 virus was engineered, and subsequently escaped from, the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan, China.

GoF refers to medical research in which an organism is genetically altered, either for military purposes or medical research, in such a way that the biological functions of gene products are enhanced.

The National Pulse reported that in February 2022, Virologica Sinica, a prominent journal of virology, published a peer-reviewed study pertaining to a monkeypox-related GoF research project performed by scientists at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in August 2021.

In this study, according to The National Pulse:

> "The Wuhan Institute of Virology assembled a monkeypox virus genome, allowing the virus to be identified through PCR tests, using a method researchers flagged for potentially creating a 'contagious pathogen.'
>
> "The paper … also follows the wide-scale use of Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests to identify COVID-19-positive individuals.
>
> "Researchers appeared to identify a portion of the monkeypox virus genome, enabling PCR tests to identify the virus."

Canadian researcher Polly St. George in a recent investigative report said there is an association between monkeypox and GoF research.

And in a recent interview, international law scholar Francis Boyle, who drafted the Biological Weapon Anti-Terrorism Act of 1989, said the bioware industry uses monkeypox as a simulant for smallpox.

Along these lines, geopolitical analyst Michael Whitney in a recent article remarked on the sudden rapid spread of monkeypox and posed the following question:

> "I wonder if that 'rapidly spreading' part has something to do with the way that researchers have been tweaking the gain-of-function of these unique pathogens in order to make them more contagious and more lethal? Is that what's going on?"

Similarly, James Lyons-Weiler pointed out monkeypox first officially appeared in 1958, "about the time scientists were injecting African subjects with blood products from monkeys to see which viruses might be transmissible. Zikavirus came into our species about the same time."

Uncertainty breeds speculation, and such is the case with some who suggested a possible link between the monkeypox outbreak and a January 2022 incident involving a truck transporting 100 laboratory monkeys that collided with a dump truck and overturned in Pennsylvania, leading to the escape of at least three monkeys.

The monkeys reportedly were later caught and euthanized, though no reason was given as to why they were killed.

An eyewitness who handled escaped monkeys developed pink eye and a cough, received treatment and was monitored by the CDC.

Others also tried to draw a connection between monkeypox and the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, which utilizes a chimpanzee adenovirus vaccine vector.

However, no such link has been reported, and it's important to note that chimpanzees are distinct from monkeys.

Is monkeypox outbreak a tool of intentional warfare?

Some officials speculated monkeypox was weaponized and intentionally released as an act of biological warfare, perhaps in relation to the conflict in Ukraine.

There are at least three such strands of speculation currently circulating:

- Claims by independent investigator Dr. Benjamin Braddock that an unnamed source at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control said, "Preliminary analysis of the monkeypox strain currently doing the rounds found the virus came from a lab and may be related to the U.S.'s biological research in Ukraine," implying that it may have been intentionally released, perhaps by Russia.
- Theories circulating in China and reported by Chinese state media that the U.S. intentionally released the virus, as part of "a plan by the U.S. to leak bioengineered monkeypox virus."
- Statements by Irina Yarovaya, co-chair of Russia's parliamentary commission on investigation of U.S. biological laboratories in Ukraine, and reported by Russia's TASS news agency, that "the U.S. researched Ebola and smallpox viruses in Ukraine," perhaps implying this resulted in the monkeypox outbreak.

These scenarios remain within the realm of speculation for the time being, but bear a close resemblance to the Wuhan lab leak scenarios under investigation in relation to the outbreak of COVID-19.

However, even if none of these scenarios hold water, they possess evident value as tools of information warfare, especially in relation to the ongoing schism between Russia and the West vis-à-vis the conflict in Ukraine.

Are monkeypox symptoms similar to COVID vaccine side effects?

Despite the current scare, monkeypox symptoms for most individuals who have been infected are mild, particularly in countries with adequate health systems.

However, they also resemble known adverse effects of the COVID-19 vaccines and symptoms of ailments such as shingles.

According to the WHO, monkeypox symptoms are characterized by "a person of any age presenting in a monkeypox non-endemic country with an unexplained acute rash," with one or more of the following symptoms (updated March 15, 2022):

- Headache
- Acute onset of fever (>38.5oC)
- Lymphadenopathy (swollen lymph nodes)
- Myalgia (muscle and body aches)
- Back pain
- Asthenia (profound weakness)

Notably, many of these symptoms appear in the list of adverse effects of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. These adverse effects include lymphadenopathy, myalgia, asthenia, back pain and headache.

Others noted the similarity between monkeypox and shingles. Indeed, an image published by TheHealthSite.com of rashes said to be caused by smallpox is identical to an image published by Australia's Queensland government displaying shingles rashes.

The CDC states, "The rash may be hard to distinguish from syphilis, herpes simplex virus infection, shingles and other more common infections."

Moreover, according to Andrew Preston, professor of microbial pathogenicity at the University of Bath, “Some people say the rash is a bit like shingles.”

In recent years, certain countries, such as the U.K., have introduced a comprehensive shingles vaccination campaign for individuals age 70 and over.

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