

MPOx and Travel to Africa: What You Need to Know (FAQ)

Q1: I'm hearing about MPox. Should I be worried about my trip to Africa?

A: It's understandable to have concerns. The good news is that the risk of catching MPox on a typical safari or nature-focused trip is very low, often lower than in your home country.

In fact, Prof Lucille H Blumberg of The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), has stated that travellers to South Africa are not at risk. She explained that Mpx transmission in South Africa requires intimate contact and is NOT spread through casual interactions in shared spaces.

Q2: What are the different types of MPox and where are they found?

A: There are four main variants of MPox:

- * Clade 1a: Found in the Congo Basin, mainly spreads from animals to humans.
- * Clade 1b: Recently causing concern in parts of East Africa.
- * Clade 2a: Found in West Africa, similar to 1a in transmission.
- * Clade 2b: Global variant, spread to 118 countries worldwide.

Q3: Haven't there been serious warnings about MPox?

A: Yes, health organisations are closely monitoring Clade 1b, which *might* be more serious. They've issued alerts to ensure resources are available to contain it, especially in Africa. These are precautions, not travel bans.

Important to note, according to Prof Blumberg is that the situation in South Africa is unrelated to the Clade 1b outbreak in the DRC.

Q4: I thought MPox was mainly spread by monkeys. Is wildlife a risk on my trip?

A: MPox was misnamed. While some variants originated in Africa, it's now a global issue spread mainly through close personal contact between people, *not* casual contact from wildlife.

Q5: So, could this become another pandemic like COVID-19?

A: It's highly unlikely. Clade 2b is already worldwide, and while considered a pandemic in 2022, it's very different from COVID-19. We have vaccines and treatments, and the spread is not as easy.

Q6: Is there a risk of worldwide travel shutdowns like with COVID-19?

A: It's nearly impossible to imagine a scenario where this would occur with MPox. We already have treatments and vaccines. If a worst-case scenario arose, the response would likely be to ramp up vaccinations, not shut down travel.

Q7: So, what is the real risk for travellers like me?

A: The highest risk of MPox comes from close contact with an infected person, particularly through sexual networks. Regular tourist activities are not considered risky.

The following are NOT considered to be a risk in themselves:

- Travelling through airports or on planes, buses, etc.
- Driving or walking through villages
- Casually sitting next to someone
- Staying or sleeping in safari camps or lodges
- Eating food from reputable companies/restaurants
- Wildlife viewing
- Being in forests or around trees

Q8: Are there any specific areas in Africa I should avoid?

A: Southern African countries (South Africa, Namibia, etc.) haven't reported any cases of the concerning Clade 1b variant. They only have Clade 2b, which is **globally** endemic. There have been a few Clade 1b cases in East Africa (Kenya, Rwanda), but the situation is being closely watched.

Q9: What precautions can I take to stay safe?

A: The same precautions you'd take anywhere:

- * Practice safe sex, especially with new partners.
- * Avoid close contact with anyone who is visibly unwell (rash, fever).
- * Maintain good hygiene (regular handwashing, etc.).

Q10: Should I get the MPox vaccine before my trip?

A: Vaccinations are available, but whether you need one or are eligible to have one depends on your individual circumstances. Speak to your doctor or a travel health clinic for personalised advice.

Q11: Is it irresponsible to travel to Africa right now? Could I put local communities at risk?

A: Actually, responsible travel can be beneficial. It supports local economies and can help communities access resources to address health challenges. Remember, the risk of MPox is often higher in travellers' home countries than in the destinations themselves.

Q12: Where can I get reliable, up-to-date information?

A: The best sources are:

- * Your doctor or a travel health clinic
- * Official websites like the World Health Organisation (WHO) and national health authorities (e.g., UKHSA)
- * Reputable travel advice from your government (e.g., FCDO in the UK)

Remember: Stay informed, take sensible precautions, and enjoy your trip!