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The Impact of Mpox on Children's Health: A Comprehensive Overview

Ni Made Gita Andariska
Faculty of Medicine, Warmadewa University-Denpasar, Indonesia
gitaandariska@gmail.com

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Abstract
Mpox (formerly monkey pox) is an emerging zoonotic disease caused by infection with the Mpox virus, which affects both humans and animals. Although serious sickness can develop in certain groups, including children, immunocompromised people, and pregnant women, the condition commonly recovers by itself. Rapid globalization, population migration, and expanding trade networks all have contributed a role in the international spread of Mpox in recent years, leading to outbreaks in a number of nations. Children may be more vulnerable to severe illness symptoms, such as sepsis, encephalitis, and even death or permanent disability, according to data from previously outbreaks. Furthermore, according to the paper, infants delivered to pregnant women who infected the Mpox virus should be closely watched in specialist care facilities. This overview presents a thorough review of Mpox, including its transmission patterns, epidemiology and pathogenesis. This review aims to provide updated information about Mpox virus for designing better treatment.
Keywords: Virus; Mypox; Children;

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Introduction

Mpox (formerly monkey pox) is an emerging zoonotic disease caused by infection with the Mpox virus, which affects both humans and animals. Person-to-person transmission of monkey pox happens by things, droplets, or direct touch; animal-to-human transmission happens through infected sores or fluids. Though serious sickness can develop in certain groups, especially children, immunocompromised people, and pregnant women, the condition generally resolves by itself (Karagoz et al., 2023)

Since its first discovery in 1958 in monkeys, the virus has been found in a variety of animal species. In the Central African Republic of Congo, the first human case of Mpox was identified in 1970. Rapid globalization, population migration, and expanding trade networks have all played a role in the international spread of Mpox in recent years, leading to outbreaks in a number of nations. It is crucial to note that, despite the World Health Organization's declaration that Mpox outbreaks will no longer qualify as a "World Public Health Emergency of Concern by May 2023," the rapid evolution of the virus and an increase in international travel have led to an increase in Mpox cases in some Asian regions (Lu et al., 2023)

Uncertainty surrounding the epidemic's containment and the risk of transmission at the social level has increased the likelihood of Mpox virus cross-border dissemination and subsequent transmission in children under the age of ten. Based on data from previous outbreaks, children might be more vulnerable to the disease's severe symptoms, which could include encephalitis, sepsis, and even death or permanent disability. Furthermore, according to the paper, infants delivered to pregnant women who contracted the Mpox virus should be thoroughly monitored in specialist care facilities (Maru et al., 2023)

To effectively manage this disease, a new understanding of Mpox is required. This overview presents a thorough review of Mpox, including its transmission patterns, epidemiology and pathogenesis. This review aims to provide updated information about Mpox virus for designing better treatment.

Epidemiology

In 1970, in DRC child who was nine months old was the first MPV case ever recorded. Although MPV outbreaks have increased since 1970, they are mostly found in Africa. Between 1970 and 1979, there were up to 48 confirmed cases of Mpox in six African nations. Over 400 human MPV cases had been identified by 1986, and the mortality rate was close to 10% (Kumar, Acharya, Gendelman, & Byrareddy, 2022)

At the time of initial human identification, 282 cases were documented in Zaire between 1980 and 1985. Ninety percent of them were under fifteen, and their ages ranged from one month to 69 years. Vaccinated patients showed no death, whereas unvaccinated cases had an average fatality rate of 11%, with higher rates in children (15%) (Karagoz et al., 2023). The monkeypox virus (MPXV) triggered an outbreak of Mpox in 2022 that started in Europe and expanded around the world. The disease was primarily disseminated through sexual contact between people. MPXV has been the cause of an mpox outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since November 2023. The number of

MPXV-related cases rose in 2024 and extended to many more African nations. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) designated mpox a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and a Public Health Emergency of Continental Security, respectively, in August 2024. (ECDC., 2022)

Pathogenesis

Mpox is a self-limiting illness, and a number of variables, including the particular viral strain, a person's immune system, and any potential consequences, can affect how severe an infection is (Mahmoud & Nchasi, 2023). Pain, fever, exhaustion, and lymphadenectasis are typical early signs of Mpox virus infection; notable inguinal lymphadenectasis is frequently seen. Infection with the Mpox virus can be distinguished from other Ortho poxviruses by the presence of lymphadenectasis. Furthermore, creating efficient defences against Mpox requires an understanding of the method of transmission. The Mpox virus enters surrounding tissues through mucous membranes (such as ocular, respiratory, oral, urethral, and rectal) or broken skin after being exposed to the respiratory secretions or bodily fluids of Mpox patients. It then travels throughout the body through draining lymph nodes and immune cells that reside in the tissue (Altindis, Puca, & Shapo, 2022)

Commonly lasting up to two weeks, this is the latent period for Mpox virus infection. People who have contracted Mpox are typically asymptomatic and free of lesions during this time. People infected with the Mpox virus start to show unusual symptoms after the latent phase, such as fever and chills, headache, muscle soreness, and lymphadenectasis. Mpox's early prodromal symptoms usually persist for three days. Rashes start on the head and face and then spread to other parts of the body following the fever and lymphadenectasis. From papules to vesicles and pustules, the rash eventually develops into crusts that cure and leave behind scars. About two to four weeks pass during this increasing rash period (Malik, Ahmed, Ahsan, Muhammad, & Waheed, 2023)

Rashes that initially develop around the genital or anal area and then spread throughout the body are among the atypical clinical signs of the current Mpox outbreak among men who have sex with men (MSM). Complications include haemorrhagic disease, necrotic disease, obstructive disease, inflammation of important organs, and septicaemia can result with severe Mpox virus infections. In non-epidemic areas, the Mpox case fatality rate in 2022 was approximately 0.04%. These severe manifestations are more likely to occur in immunocompromised persons, such as youngsters, the elderly, and those with immunodeficiencies (such as HIV patients and those taking immunosuppressive drugs). Immunocompromised people are also more likely to have contributed to Mpox's evolution, which has increased its adaptability to human hosts and led to its global transmission (Zahmatyar et al., 2023)

Clinical manifestation

There are two stages to the Mpox illness clinical syndrome (Table 1). Before a rash appears, there is usually a 1–5 day prodromal phase with fever, lymphadenopathy, and influenza-like symptoms following an incubation period of 7–13 days (range 5–21 days). Although the rash may appear without prodrome, a skin eruption follows. Over the duration of the disease, the rash's shape and distribution change. It begins as macules and moves through papular, vesicular, pustular, and umbilicated stages over the period of two to three weeks, preceding crust formation and desquamation. The rash usually spreads centrifugally during this period, moving from the facial region distally to the extremities, including the palms and soles. Ulceration in the oropharyngeal, anogenital, or ocular mucosa can be uncomfortable and lead to nutrition deficiencies and dehydration. (WHO, 2022).

Although mpox typically resolves by itself in 2-4 weeks, people who are immunocompromised, pregnant women, and children may experience complications. These include sepsis, encephalitis, pneumonia, retropharyngeal abscess from cervical lymphadenopathy, corneal lesions or secondary ocular infections that cause vision loss, exfoliation of significant sections of skin that necessitates surgical grafting, and secondary bacterial infection of skin lesions. Fear, stigma, and the existing necessity in many jurisdictions to undergo a prolonged 21-day period of isolation can also cause severe psychological hardship for patients (Minhaj et al., 2022)

Table 1

Signs and symptoms of classical Mpox disease (Huang, Mu, & Wang, 2022)

	Initial (prodromal) phase	**Second phase**
Common manifestations	Fever • Headache • Back pain • Myalgia • Malaise • Lymphadenopathy	- Evolving rash over sequential stages – macules, papules, vesicles, pustules and umbilication, prior to crusting over and desquamating over a period of 2–3 weeks. - Eruption tends to be centrifugal: starting on the face and progressing towards the hands and feet, and can involve the oral mucous membranes, conjunctiva, cornea and/or genitalia - Observations from the 2022 outbreak describe lesion(s) commencing in the genital area (often with only a single lesion observed), and a predisposition for rash to occur without a prodromal phase
Severe manifestations		- Bacterial skin and soft tissue infections (cellulitis, abscesses, necrotizing soft tissue) - Severe pneumonia - Corneal infection which may lead to vision loss - Vomiting and diarrhea, which may result in severe dehydration, electrolyte abnormalities and shock - Sepsis - Encephalitis

Source: Huang, 2022

Disease Spectrum in Children

Children typically acquire mpox in the home or after having close contact with infected animals. Sharing utensils with an infected individual or sharing a bed or room are specific risk factors. An rising number of children have been exposed in families as the sickness has spread throughout the United Kingdom in 2022 (Nolen et al., 2015)

Until for a while, most deaths from monkey pox occurred in children under the age of ten; from 100% of recorded deaths in 1970–1999 to 37.5% in 2000–2019. Prolonged hospitalization has been linked to children who come with oropharyngeal monkey pox lesions and nausea or vomiting. Pneumonitis, corneal ulceration, encephalitis, multi-organ failure, and (rarely) fulminant hepatosplenic infiltration are among the severe symptoms that have been documented in infants and children and can result in death or long-term disability. Co-infection with the varicella zoster virus (VZV) is well known, and its clinical signs might be indistinguishable from those of an infection (Hughes et al., 2021)

In one case series from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, congenital monkey pox infection has been reported, with stillbirth as a frequent consequence. Fetal death was the outcome of three of the four infections detailed in this case series, which happened after a maternal infection in the first and second trimesters. One fetus had vertical transmission, as evidenced by hepatomegaly, hydrops fetalis, widespread skin lesions, and an elevated viral load in fetal tissues (Mbala et al., 2017)

Diagnosis

The early clinical manifestation of Mpox may be similar to several kinds of common rash conditions, such as juvenile molluscum contagiosum and varicella zoster (chickenpox). The epidemiological, clinical, and (if available) test results should all be taken into account when diagnosing Mpox. Clinical cases can be categorized as probable, suspected, or confirmed based on any history of Mpox exposure during the previous 21 days. A comprehensive examination of the body's skin and mucous membranes should also be part of the diagnosis. It is recommended to collect two swabs from two to three lesions, ideally from distinct body locations or lesions with distinct appearances, and submit them for laboratory analysis. The standard procedure for collecting specimens involves vigorously rubbing the lesion's surface with a dry synthetic swab. Deroofing and puncturing the lesion are not required; however, they are not advised because of the possibility of sharps injuries. Scabs or crusts may occasionally be sent in for examination. (HAN., 2022)

A history of recent international travel to a country with a high number of current cases, close or intimate in-person contact with individuals in a social network experiencing Mpox activity, such as men who have sex with men who meet partners through an online website, digital app, or social event, and contact with a person or people with a similar appearing rash or with a Mpox diagnosis are examples of epidemiologic risk factors. (MMWR.,2022)

Mpox can be contracted and spread by anyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Household contacts or others may contract Mpox through close nonsexual contact with infected patients or contaminated surfaces, even though the majority of patients in this epidemic have reported close sexual or personal interaction prior to the onset of illness. During this outbreak, a few children in the US and around the world have been reported to have mpox (Borton, 2022)

Children who have interacted with a case in a domestic setting should be closely watched. Children should have PCR testing from lesion samples (in a lab for orthopox monitoring) as soon as a compatible rash appears. They should also be tested for other causes of vesicular rash, such as syphilis, enterovirus, herpes simplex virus, and VZV. Mpox patients usually have detectable levels of anti-orthopox IgM antibody 4–56 days after rash onset, or a four-fold increase in IgG antibody titre between acute and convalescent (day 21 onwards) samples. Serological testing is another option. Because the results are non-specific, histopathological investigation of skin lesions is typically not beneficial (Huang et al., 2022)

Management

The majority of Mpox patients are treated with symptomatic measures. Along with Mpox-specific medication countermeasures, CDC treatment guidelines also address pain management. After consulting with the CDC, a number of antiviral medications and vaccines created for smallpox patients can be used in certain populations at risk for severe illness or in particular Mpox patients. For those at high risk for serious illness, such as those with HIV, children, pregnant and lactating women, and those with highly impaired immune systems, the CDC has also released basic treatment guidelines and considerations. The Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response's Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) offers a number of medical countermeasures in the United States, including the vaccines JYNNEOSTM and ACAM2000, as well as the treatments Tecovirimat (also known as TPOXX), vaccinia immune globulin intravenous (VIGIV), and cidofovir (Thornhill et al., 2022)

VIG, antiviral medications, and other treatments for monkeypox infections are all regarded as experimental for this use. Tecovirimat, an oral smallpox medicine, is the only orthopoxvirus-specific antiviral currently on the market. Since tecovirimat's safety has only been evaluated in one human phase I trial, its adverse effect profile—including its safety in pregnancy and children—remains unknown (Grosenbach et al., 2018). Cidofovir is an antiviral medication that has been used to treat adenovirus and human herpesvirus in addition to treating cytomegalovirus in immunocompromised patients. Although cidofovir exhibits in vitro anti-monkeypox activity, its application is restricted due to its adverse effect profile, which includes nephrotoxicity. Brin cidofovir, an oral cidofovir analogue, has a significant side effect profile and little published data on its use in treating monkeypox. In 2018, it was used to treat three adult cases of monkeypox in the UK, but all patients experienced an increase in alanine aminotransferase levels, which resulted in the medication's discontinuation (Adler et al., 2022)

Conclusion

Mpox (formerly monkey pox) is an emerging zoonotic disease caused by infection with the Mpox virus, which affects both humans and animals. The disease is usually self-limiting, but severe illness can occur in certain groups especially children, and people who are immunocompromised or pregnant. Developing rapid laboratory diagnostic methods, specific vaccines, and therapies for the prevention and treatment of monkeypox infection should be a part of the efforts to limit the outbreak.

Currently, no particular therapeutics are available for monkeypox, and the anti-viral agents developed against the smallpox virus are being used to treat monkeypox infection. In many cases, monkeypox patients develop a mild, self-limiting disease; In the current monkeypox outbreak, there is a big concern about human-to- human transmission to household members and care providers. Considering the pandemic burden, the public health importance of monkeypox disease should not be underestimated.

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