World Health Organization to phase out use of the term "monkeypox"

The World Health Organization has said it will rename monkeypox, and aims to use the word "mpox" instead.

Source: Pixabay

When the outbreak of monkeypox expanded earlier this year, racist and stigmatising language online, in other settings and in some communities was observed and reported to WHO.

In several meetings, public and private, a number of individuals and countries raised concerns and asked WHO to propose a way forward to change the name.

Assigning names to new and, very exceptionally, to existing diseases is the responsibility of WHO under the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and the WHO Family of International Health Related Classifications through a consultative process which includes WHO member states.

WHO, in accordance with the ICD update process, held consultations to gather views from a range of experts, as well as countries and the general public, who were invited to submit suggestions for new names.

Based on these consultations, and further discussions with WHO's director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO recommends the adoption of the new synonym "mpox" in English for the disease.

Mpox will become a preferred term, replacing monkeypox, after a transition period of one year. This serves to mitigate the concerns raised by experts about confusion caused by a name change in the midst of a global outbreak.

It also gives time to complete the ICD update process and to update WHO publications.

The synonym mpox will be included in the ICD-10 online in the coming days. It will be a part of the official 2023 release of ICD-11, which is the current global standard for health data, clinical documentation and statistical aggregation.

The term "monkeypox" will remain a searchable term in ICD, to match historic information.

Usually, the ICD updating process can take up to several years. In this case, the process was accelerated.