Cracking the Mpox code: Insights, Learning, and Policy Pathways for India

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Monkey pox, a viral infection that affects the skin and mucosa, had been a concern globally, leading to various research and response efforts across the globe. A glimpse of employed strategies can enhance our preparedness for zoonotic outbreaks as an addon to the ongoing efforts being done in India.

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) responded to the monkeypox outbreak with a comprehensive strategy. They identified high-risk populations, particularly bisexual, gay, and men who have sex with men communities, as being more susceptible to infection. CDC collaborated with community organisations to administer vaccines and raise awareness about prevention measures, especially among disproportionately affected groups. Clinicians were provided with updated recommendations for diagnosis, treatment, and care, and efforts were made to ensure equitable vaccine distribution.

In Europe, the WHO launched a campaign to eliminate monkeypox, focusing on raising awareness and encouraging sustained action by affected populations, health authorities, event organisers, and healthcare providers. Underserved communities were given a platform to share their experiences and needs, and the crucial role of organisations representing gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men in combating monkeypox was highlighted. The campaign is supported by a policy brief that outlines actions needed to control and eliminate the virus in the WHO European Region.

The use of tecovirimat under the MEURI framework, along with the potential cross-immunity provided by previous smallpox vaccines, offer potential strategies for treatment and prevention. The CDC's response in the United States, with a focus on high-risk populations, improved surveillance, and equitable vaccine distribution, demonstrates the importance of targeted interventions.

Call to Action for Policy Makers:

India can learn valuable lessons from the global efforts and experiences in addressing monkeypox outbreak.

1. **Enhance public health infrastructure:** Adequate investment in public health infrastructure is crucial for effectively responding to monkeypox outbreaks. Policymakers should allocate resources to enhance healthcare facilities, including the availability of isolation units, personal protective equipment, and trained healthcare personnel.

2. **Emergency use protocols:** India can consider developing and implementing emergency use protocols similar to the MEURI framework.[1] This would allow for the use of unproven clinical interventions, like tecovirimat, during outbreaks when there is limited clinical evidence. Such protocols can ensure timely access to potential treatments and contribute to understanding their effectiveness.

3. **Data collection and monitoring:** India can establish a robust data collection and monitoring system, similar to the WHO Global Clinical Data Platform,[2,3] to gather anonymized patient data and improve understanding of the clinical characteristics, variation, and associations of monkeypox. This can aid in evidence-based decision-making and enhance the quality of collected data.

4. **Invest in One Health approaches:** Monkeypox is a zoonotic disease, highlighting the importance of One Health approaches that integrate human, animal, and environmental health. Policy makers should invest in interdisciplinary collaborations and surveillance systems that monitor the interface between humans, animals, and the environment to detect and respond to potential outbreaks at their source.[4]

5. **Integrated national operational plans:** Drawing from the WHO's policy brief, India can develop integrated national operational plans that outline actions needed to control and eliminate monkeypox in the country. These plans should encompass surveillance, prevention strategies, outbreak response protocols, and coordination among various stakeholders, including health authorities and event organizers. These are in line with India's Public Health Surveillance Vision 2035.[5]

By incorporating these learnings, India can enhance its preparedness, response, and control measures in tackling future monkeypox outbreaks effectively, ultimately protecting the health and well-being of its population.

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