

# Monkeypox virus among seafarers is not to be neglected

Isaac Olushola Ogunkola<sup>1</sup>, Molly Unoh Ogbodum<sup>1</sup>, Adeola Abidemi Adetola<sup>2</sup>, Yusuff Adebayo Adebisi<sup>3</sup>, Edith Nnenna Utaka<sup>4</sup>, Oluwaseyifunmi Oladipo<sup>5</sup>, Don Eliseo Lucero-Prisno III<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Health, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Radiography, Navy Reference Hospital, Calabar, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria

<sup>4</sup>Department of Community health and Primary Care, College of Medicine, University of Lagos Nigeria

<sup>5</sup>Department of Human Nutrition and Dietetics, Faculty of Public Health, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

<sup>6</sup>Department of Global Health and Development, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, United Kingdom

Almost 2 million seafarers must work around the globe to ensure the supply of goods required for daily living [1]. The most international of all industries is the shipping industry, which accounts for 80% of the global trade. Shipping is the most reliable, efficient, and effective mode of transportation, especially for maintaining the supply chains open and delivering cargo and supplies that the world requires on a daily basis [1].

Among the worries that have surfaced throughout the pandemic is leaving seafarers abandoned on their ships. Additionally, infectious illness outbreaks are more likely to occur on ships [1]. Even in the case of a global pandemic, it is inhumane to forbid seafarers from coming ashore for transit, transfer, or crew replacement purposes. Public health concerns may very well be a valid justification for this, but it is not a valid reason to prevent seafarers from taking shore leave [1]. Following the World Health Organization's (WHO) announcement that the monkeypox outbreak is now classified as a public health emergency of international concern, seafarers around the world are preparing for potential future inconveniences from port states [2]. Since May, over 16,000 cases of monkeypox have been reported in 74 countries. This means the outbreak has become an "extraordinary event" that could spread to more countries and calls for a coordinated global response [2].

The conditions under which seafarers have to work in the face of an outbreak are likely to deteriorate, as was the case with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, when seafarers were left stranded at sea and uncertain of when the next crew change would be permitted. This could

just be another repeated scenario of inhumane treatment as was the case with the COVID-19 pandemic [3]. Seafarers will never forget how they were frequently left practically stranded when port officials around the world forbade ships from docking for fear that a super-spreader event would occur [3]. Significant challenges on international shipping include port and border closures for cruise ships and airlines, crew changeover and repatriation for seafarers, licensing and certification of seafarers, resupply, repairs, ship surveys, and certification [1, 3].

On the backdrop of a fading pandemic, the President of the Liner Trade's InterManager Crew Association has emphasized the need for WHO to establish the required standards for responding wisely to situations like the outbreak of monkeypox [3]. He also stated that the legacy from COVID-19 should not be a hasty, inappropriate, or exaggerated response to news of every viral or bacterial outbreak [3]. As the world deals with monkeypox, shipping executives have pleaded with policy-makers to refrain from any irrational responses [2]. However, we cannot forget how important is the risk communication, such as displaying posters, movies, and message boards, to alert crew members about monkeypox [4, 5]. Promoting personal safety precautions and risk-reducing behaviour is crucial, especially before visits to the shore [4, 5]. A potential public health crisis must be assessed and prepared for as soon as possible given the disturbingly high number of cases of monkeypox. It is past time to propose various risk-control strategies to deal with the risk's ongoing expansion [5].

**Conflict of interest:** None declared

✉ Dr. Isaac Olushola Ogunkola, Department of Public Health, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria, tel: +2349063122024, e-mail: Isaacson.olushola@gmail.com

Received: 30.09.2022 Accepted: 17.10.2022

This article is available in open access under Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license, allowing to download articles and share them with others as long as they credit the authors and the publisher, but without permission to change them in any way or use them commercially.

## REFERENCES

1. Doumbia-Henry C. Shipping and COVID-19: protecting seafarers as frontline workers. *WMU J Marit Affairs*. 2020; 19(3): 279–293, doi: [10.1007/s13437-020-00217-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13437-020-00217-9).
2. Sea farers on edge as monkeypox declared a global public health emergency (2022). <https://splash247.com/seafarers-on-edge-as-monkey-declared-a-global-public-health-emergency/>.
3. Sea farers scared of monkeypox pandemic (2022). <https://mfame.guru/seafarers-scared-of-monkeypox-pandemic/>.
4. Monkeypox declared a global public health emergency (2022). <https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/monkeypox-declared-a-global-public-health-emergency/>.
5. Awan MA, Waseem M, Sahito AF, et al. Monkeypox has devastated the world; should we prepare for the outbreak of a new pandemic? *Ann Med Surg (Lond)*. 2022; 79: 104051, doi: [10.1016/j.amsu.2022.104051](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amsu.2022.104051), indexed in Pubmed: [35860122](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35860122/).