

Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)

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In news– WHO Director-General has recently declared the ongoing monkeypox outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

What is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern?

- **A PHEIC is defined in the International Health Regulations (2005), as, “an extraordinary event which is determined to constitute a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response”.**
- This definition implies a **situation that is:**
 - Serious, sudden, unusual or unexpected.
 - Carries implications for public health beyond the affected State’s national border and
 - may require immediate international action.
- **A PHEIC need not necessarily be an infectious disease, even a radioactive accident or hazardous chemical could qualify.**
- The purpose of declaring a public health emergency is for the world to sit up and take notice.
- **What it means for the world is that all countries need to pay attention to detecting and controlling this disease,** with special focus on the networks that it is actively spreading.

Previous PHEICs

- 2009: H1N1 flu declared a PHEIC and then a pandemic.
- 2014: Ebola and polio virus declared PHEIC.
- 2016: Zika virus was declared a PHEIC.
- 2019: Ebola virus was declared a PHEIC.

- 2020: Covid-19 was declared a PHEIC and then a pandemic.

The International Health Regulations (2005)-

- It represents a binding international legal agreement involving 196 countries across the globe, including all the Member States of WHO.
- Their aim is to help the international community prevent and respond to acute public health risks that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide.
- The purpose and scope of the IHR (2005) is to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.

What is Monkeypox?

- Monkeypox is a viral zoonotic disease with symptoms similar to smallpox, although with less clinical severity.
- The infection was first discovered in 1958 following two outbreaks of a pox-like disease in colonies of monkeys kept for research which led to the name 'monkeypox'.
- It begins with a fever, headache, muscle aches, back ache, and exhaustion. It also causes the lymph nodes to swell (lymphadenopathy), which smallpox does not.
- It is important not to confuse monkeypox with chickenpox, measles, bacterial skin infections, scabies, syphilis and medication-associated allergies.
- It is usually a self-limiting disease with symptoms lasting from two to four weeks.
- The incubation period (time from infection to symptoms) for monkeypox is usually 7-14 days but can range from 5-21 days.
- The disease goes through four different phases. The

first invasion period, which is between 0-5 days, is characterised by fever, headache and lymph node swelling.