

From COVID-19 to monkeypox: how to apply the lessons learnt to the new outbreak

Episode 9 of the webinar series
'Health Management in action: Fostering health systems' resilience'

Speaker

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The ninth episode of the webinar series *'Health Management in action: fostering health systems' resilience'* brought the perspective of the Public Health Authority of the city of Frankfurt in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and how they implemented the lessons learnt to the later monkeypox (mpox) outbreak.

The daily tasks of the Public Health Authority of the city of Frankfurt are infection control, municipal hygiene, disaster management, official medical examinations, children health, community psychiatry, environmental health, dental services, humanitarian medicine, preventive medicine, and health communications. Being a Federal Republic, Germany regulates the response to infectious diseases at the federal level and the states must comply with federal law.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany, the priority was the identification of measures to reduce the risk of viral transmission; while with the arrival of the vaccines, vaccination hubs were created. Following a federal order in December 2020, the Frankfurt vaccination centre was created in 4 weeks and was fully operational in January 2021, hosting up to 4,000 patients per day.

Everything was new in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The urgency of the situation required a learning-by-doing approach. Staff often were people without previous experience; therefore, communication played a crucial role. The documentation, analysis, and transfer of vaccination data required new technologies to be introduced. Data analysis was crucial to inform policies and had to be compliant with data protection standards. Vaccine logistics was also new, both for public authorities and for the pharmaceutical industry. For the first time, vaccines were purchased centrally and distributed at the local level. Another challenging element was scientific and public communications, due to the broad media interest. Finally, it was unclear how long the emergency phase would last, making planning even more difficult.

The outbreak of a new disease, the monkeypox (mpox), brought new challenges. The vaccination process was complicated by uncertainty in the payment model, complicated communications, and decentralised logistics. Differently from the COVID-19 pandemic, mpox impacted a more defined group of the population: men having sex with men. The restricted patient group raised sensitive issue in communication.

However the lessons learnt from the COVID pandemic facilitated the response to mpox. Health personnel was trained to respond to an uncertain situation and became more familiar with new digital technologies. Strategies and procedures for the vaccination

campaign were already in place. The systems adopted in response to COVID-19 and the new approaches to work were implemented to tackle mpox.

Take-home messages

- Public Health Authority's daily tasks are infection control, municipal hygiene, disaster management, official medical examinations, children health, community psychiatry, environmental health, dental services, humanitarian medicine, preventive medicine, and health communications.
- The mpox outbreak presented similarities and differences with the COVID pandemic. Where possible, lessons learnt from the COVID response were applied to contain the mpox spread. The personnel was trained to respond to an uncertain situation and became more familiar with new digital technologies. Strategies and procedures for the vaccination campaign were already in place.



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