Addressing Stigma & Public Trust
Lessons from the 2022 UK MPox Outbreak

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Background

- **MPox** (Monkeypox) virus
- Until 2022 the disease was largely **limited to regions in Africa**
- Since **May 2022**, MPox cases have been reported from non-endemic countries
- **Clade IIb** lower morbidity and increased human transmission compared to Clade I
- **3,777 cases** in the UK 2022-2023 disproportionately affecting gay, bisexual, queer, and other men-who-have-sex-with-men (GBMSM) community
- **Sexual health services** were key in the identification and prevention of MPox in the UK
History repeating…

Concerns raised over public reporting & commentary surrounding the 2022 MPox outbreak

- Language & imagery that reinforce homophobic and racist stereotypes
- MPox associated with sexual behaviour & sexuality
- Stigma and blame undermine trust and capacity to respond effectively during outbreaks
Project Aim

To contribute to the prevention and treatment of emerging infectious diseases among GBMSM in England through improved communication strategies that are non-stigmatising and equitable.

Identify communication habits/ preferences

Explore perceptions of MPox public health messaging

Co-create communication strategies with priority populations

Public health communication guidance
## Methods

### Key informant interviews

- **Key Informant Interviews** (N=11):
  - 4 Infectious disease clinicians
  - 2 Sexual health clinician
  - 2 Community organisers
  - 2 UKHSA employees
  - 1 Previous sex worker

### Participatory design workshops

- **GBMSM Workshops** (N=13):
  - Migrant and global majority (N=6)
  - Sex positive group (N=5)
  - 2nd sex positive group (N=2)
  - 18-25yo (tbc)

### Analysis

- General inductive approach, Health and Discrimination Framework

### Stakeholder consultation

- FTC Conference > Liverpool City Council > Publish Guidance
Emerging Themes

**Impact of HIV Communications**

- Anti-Paternalism in Communications
- Importance of Honesty in Communications
- Reduced Public Trust in Governmental Bodies
- Impact of Recent Covid-19 Measures
- Role of Community Champions and 3rd Sector

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**It generated flashbacks to HIV in the 80s. And it was almost like those sensationalist newspapers, something they could leap on, and it took away all the hard work that people put into HIV communication for the past 30 odd years...and put a massive dent in the ship, and now it’s in for repairs.**

- GBMSM workshop, sex positive

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**The association with higher prevalence within gay communities and all of that kind of that history that we have there, it’s a it’s a difficult one to unpick and I think it’s always going to be troublesome, especially with that shared history around the 80s and how HIV was handled.**

- Key informant, community organiser
Emerging Themes

Impact of HIV Communications

Anti-Paternalism in Communications

Importance of Honesty in Communications

Reduced Public Trust in Governmental Bodies

Impact of Recent Covid-19 Measures

Role of Community Champions and 3rd Sector

More likely to listen to advice and suggestions. Warnings can be too, telling people what to do, and it should be more like a guide. Sometimes human nature is more likely to rebel against [messages that say] don’t do this etc.

- GBMSM workshop, migrant

It’s OK to say that you don’t know, because that is better in the long run than saying that things are more definitive than they are, in case they change.

- key informant, UKHSA
Emerging Themes

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Impact of Recent Covid-19 Measures

Role of Community Champions and 3rd Sector

For central government, I don’t trust and don’t use [them as a source of information].
- GBMSM workshop, migrant

Unfortunately [trust] its just damaged, and it leads onto other things. Because if then the government is trying to get out a health message, it’s how much do you trust what they are now saying.
- GBMSM workshop, sex positive
Emerging Themes

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Role of Community Champions and 3rd Sector

Up until the pandemic, I’ve had active skepticism towards what they’re saying... But after what happened with Covid... When it comes to Government now, unfortunately they’ve damaged themselves... They say they’ve done the best they can, they’ve saved all these people. Yet you hear in other the headlines that the prime minister at one point alleged to have said ‘let the bodies pile high.’

- GBMSM workshop, sex positive

Post Covid, people are much more aware of outbreaks, aware of transmission. But then the conspiracy theories go hand in hand with it. And so I think you’re even more acutely aware of how anything you say could be taken and spun, or a clip put on Twitter or something like that and so I think you are even more cautious about speculating.

- key informant, clinician
Emerging Themes

Impact of HIV Communications

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Role of Community Champions and 3rd Sector

We [UKHSA] used a lot of the local organisations and how they communicated out with their partners to get that message through... the most effective way was to use those local channels and use the organisations themselves to give that message in the right way to their relevant communities.

- key informant, UKHSA

One thing I've learned massively with monkeypox was the power of that patient voice through social media. It was, 'I demand my monkeypox vaccine', 'where is my prevention that you must give me to keep me safe'. Whereas for the last 30 years, we've been desperately trying to get people to use condoms and protect themselves from HIV...We were having people banging on our doors demanding prevention and protection.

- key informant, clinician
## Co-Creation Communication

### Vaccine Conversations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embrace an attitude of empathy and collaboration</th>
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<td>Ask permission to discuss vaccines</td>
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<td>Motivational interviewing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respond to questions about vaccine health or mental health</td>
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<td>Discuss vaccine option that may alleviate concerns about side effects</td>
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*Image of a diagram with notes about MPox and symptoms.*
Preliminary Recommendations

1. Honest and clear communication - do not over or understate risk or certainty

2. Co-develop messaging with close to community organisations and priority populations.

3. Reflect on historical influences that have shaped current public perception of disease and the health system.

4. Continue evaluating the effectiveness and accuracy of messaging and adapt based on emerging evidence.

5. Ensure resources match what public health messaging promotes.

6. Leverage existing and established frameworks and networks, avoid working in disease silos and duplication of effort.
With thanks to…

Implementing partners:

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