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Major sporting events amid monkeypox and COVID-19 outbreaks: Considering the impact upon the traveller

Across 2022, international travel began to return to more typical patterns, including spectators at major sporting events. For example, in October 2022, the T20 cricket world cup is being held in Australia, and the football world cup begins in Qatar in the Middle East in November 2022. These events would be attended by several hundred thousand visitors from multiple countries. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, and the monkeypox outbreak has also been declared a global emergency [1,2]. Organizing sports events under such conditions pose specific challenges for organizers. However, measures taken to prevent the spread of these infections also influence the ability of spectators to travel and their experiences when they arrive.

Cancelling or postponing sporting events, or disallowing the attendance of viewers, can be considered, like in the case of the Tokyo Olympics 2020 in Japan [3]. However, cancelling sports events may have adverse effects, including economic consequences [4]. The focus is often on the health measures to should be taken by governments and event organizers. However, perhaps there is typically less attention on those spectators who wish to travel. Extreme restrictions have been necessary across the COVID-19 pandemic but can cause significant socio-economic consequences for travellers. Therefore, it is vital to look at how things look from travellers' perspectives and what can be done to improve the experience.

For travellers, issues start from day one when planning starts. Here it is vital to understand that tickets for these events must be procured in advance, which is generally quite expensive, as these are premium sporting events. However, buying tickets to the events, booking flights or other travel, and getting a visa, do not guarantee that a person would be able to arrive and experience those events. The present epidemiological situation often demands that a person must be free from specific infections at the time of travel. If a person has some symptoms resembling the concerning conditions, including COVID-19, one may not be able to pass through the airport in their country of departure. Travel stress can negatively impact travellers' health, and this mental stress may even exacerbate chronic ailments like hypertension, diabetes, and other health disorders [5].

The FIFA World Cup, to be held in Qatar, is among the most significant sporting events on the planet, and thus people of diverse backgrounds are expected to view it, with more than 1.5 million visitors. However, despite the ongoing pandemic, epidemics and health emergencies, Qatar needs to do more to provide a smooth experience to visitors. Presently, Qatar asks for a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) taken within 48 hours of boarding the flight, or a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT), within 24 hours. These timelines are narrow to be as accurate as possible, but they can cause significant stress to travellers.

Additionally, people still need a COVID-19 vaccination certificate to enter Qatar. Some travellers are also expected to download the app *ehteraz*, which is necessary for Gulf Cooperation Council nationals [6]. There are also other vaccinations where proof is needed for travel. These immunizations can add to travelling costs, and some may be hesitant to receive vaccinations [1].

In some nations, COVID-19 tests may be costly. In addition, if someone has a fever or other doubtful symptoms on arrival, they may be subject to further testing at the airport and even be quarantined. All these factors may only add to the traveller's worries.

When it comes to monkeypox and associated travel guidelines, they are unclear. It means that travellers have to keep checking with health authorities and airlines. Qatar government could, in theory, introduce specific travel restrictions at any time. A monkeypox infection may sometimes present simply as a rash, leading to confusion and stress in the traveller about their infection status. However, if the disease is confirmed, one must not travel and isolate themselves. If monkeypox were confirmed at the destination, it would result in quarantine [7].

Travelling to Australia for the T20 world cup poses similar kinds of challenges. However, there are some differences. Australia is an island nation with a history of imposing more strict travel restrictions, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has some of the most strict biosecurity laws [8]. Several countries playing at the T20 tournament are developing nations with low per capita income and poor access to healthcare. It also means that travellers often need to apply for a visa several months in advance, sometimes at great expense. Covid-19-related travel restrictions only add to these issues. Fortunately, from July 6, 2022, Australia has eased travel restrictions significantly. It means that proof of vaccination status is not essential. It has also cancelled digital passenger declarations. Currently, passengers are expected to wear masks and must be symptom-free [7].

That is still a developing subject regarding monkeypox, and Australia has not introduced any travel restrictions associated with its outbreak. However, travellers must know that Australia has already registered 124 cases of monkeypox as on September 1, 2022. It means that travellers should be aware of the precautions needed to prevent contracting the infection [9].

Apart from travel restrictions, it is vital to realize that most travellers are also concerned about their safety. It means that despite the best efforts of the event hosting nations, those looking forward to experiencing those events have specific fears and questions. Host nations could likely go further with their health promotion, such as an app where people could ask questions and learn more about changing epidemiological landscape and other vital information. At present, the focus has perhaps been on considering what infection control restrictions to impose rather than ensuring the traveller's enjoyment once they arrive. Sensitive health promotion aimed at tourists that helps to reduce stigma or shame can encourage travellers to seek healthcare in their arrival country,

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confident they will be treated sensitively and appropriately [10].

In conclusion, organizing major sporting events must be continued, as suspending them brings extensive logistical and economic difficulties. However, countries organizing these events must not solely focus on preventive measures. They must also help alleviate the fears and concerns of travellers, help educate them, and ensure that travelling is not stressful.

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