

The World Health Organization announced Monday that it would begin using the term “mpox” to refer to monkeypox because of stigma concerns.

The WHO made the announcement Monday and said it would use the preferred term “mpox” simultaneously with the name monkeypox for one year, while the latter is phased out of use. In a news release, the WHO said the decision was made because of “racist and stigmatizing language online, in other settings and in some communities” when the disease outbreak began in early 2022.

WHO acknowledged that it is rare to change the name of existing diseases, and said it did so after “a number of individuals and countries” raised concerns in both public and private meetings and asked the agency to consider changing the name.

In accordance with policies from the International Classification of Diseases, WHO said it consulted with a number of experts and countries, as well as the general public, about possible new names.

Monkeypox was first named in 1970, but WHO did not publish its best practices for naming diseases until 2015, CNN reported. In 1970, the disease was named monkeypox because it was discovered in captive monkeys in 1958.

The new name for the disease in English, mpox, will replace monkeypox after one year, though the term monkeypox will remain a searchable term in the ICD database.

Similar concerns about naming COVID-19 variants led to the use of the Greek alphabet to name new variants, rather than the location in which they were first identified.