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WORK SHOULDN'T HURT

Monkeypox

What You Need to Know

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is tracking an outbreak of monkeypox, which has spread across several countries that don't normally report monkeypox (MPV), including the United States. While you should not panic, it's important to stay informed about MPV. This means understanding the symptoms, how it spreads, and what to do if you are exposed.

What Is MPV?

MPV is part of the same family of viruses as the variola virus, which causes smallpox. MPV symptoms are similar to smallpox symptoms, but milder, and MPV is rarely fatal.

MPV was discovered in 1958 when two outbreaks of a pox-like disease occurred in colonies of monkeys kept for research. Despite being named "monkeypox," the source of the disease remains unknown.

The first human case of MPV was recorded in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1970. Prior to the 2022 outbreak, MPV had been reported in people in several central and western African countries. Previously, almost all MPV cases in people outside of Africa were linked to international travel to countries where the disease commonly occurs or through imported animals.

How Is MPV Spread?

Transmission of MPV is related to *behaviors* rather than to *communities* or *identities*.¹ While the current outbreak in the U.S. has high rates of known cases among gay and

bisexual men and transgender and nonbinary people, this virus is not limited by gender or sexuality and **can spread to anyone, anywhere** through close, personal, often skin-to-skin contact.²

The virus can spread from person to person through **direct contact** with the infectious rash, scabs or body fluids.

It also can be spread by **respiratory secretions** during prolonged, face-to-face contact, or during intimate physical contact, such as kissing, cuddling or sex. In addition, pregnant people can spread the virus to their fetus through the placenta.

Touching items (such as clothing or linens) that previously touched the infectious rash or body fluids is another way MPV spreads.

How Can I Protect Myself from Exposure?

At this time, the risk of MPV in the United States is believed to be low. MPV does not spread easily between people; however, **anyone** in close contact with a person with MPV can get it and should take steps to protect themselves.

Take the following steps to prevent getting MPV:

- Avoid close, skin-to-skin contact with people who have a rash that looks like MPV.
 - Do not touch the rash or scabs of a person with MPV
 - Do not kiss, hug, cuddle or have sex with someone with MPV symptoms.
 - Do not share eating utensils or cups with a person with MPV.
- Do not handle or touch the bedding, towels or clothing of a person with MPV.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

¹ <https://www.glaad.org/blog/factsheet-reporters-monkeypox-and-lgbtq-community>

² <https://www.hrc.org/resources/monkeypox-and-what-you-need-to-know>

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MPV is not, at this time, considered to be a sexually transmitted disease. It is important that public health education does not stigmatize specific groups for the spread of MPV as this can result in infected persons not coming forward for care, difficulty with contact tracing, and a false sense of security for people who are not part of the stigmatized group.

Based on previous outbreaks of MPV around the world, some groups may also be at **heightened risk for severe outcomes** if they contract MPV. This includes people with weakened immune systems, the elderly, children under age 8, people with a history of eczema, and people who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

What Are the Symptoms of MPV?

Symptoms of MPV can include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches and backache
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Chills
- Exhaustion
- Respiratory symptoms (e.g., sore throat, nasal congestion or cough)
- A rash that can look like pimples or blisters that appears on the face, inside the mouth, and on other parts of the body, like the hands, feet, chest, genitals or anus.

The rash goes through different stages before healing completely. The illness typically lasts two to four weeks. Sometimes people get a rash first, followed by other symptoms. Others only experience a rash. Symptoms usually appear one to two weeks after infection.

Symptoms can be extremely painful, and people might have permanent scarring from the rash.



Infections with the type of MPV identified in this outbreak—the West African type—are rarely fatal. More than 99 percent of people who get this form of the disease are likely to survive.

If you have any symptoms of MPV, talk to your healthcare provider, even if you don't think you had contact with someone who has MPV.

What Are the Treatments for MPV?

There are no treatments specifically for MPV infections. However, because of genetic similarities in the viruses, antiviral drugs used to treat smallpox may be used to treat MPV infections. Antivirals, such as tecovirimat (TPOXX), may be recommended for people who are more likely to get severely ill, such as patients with weakened immune systems.

Should I Get a Vaccine?

Because MPV and smallpox viruses are genetically similar, vaccines developed to protect against smallpox viruses may be used to prevent MPV infections. The U.S. government has two stockpiled vaccines—JYNNEOS and ACAM2000—that can prevent MPV in people who are exposed to the virus. Vaccines may be recommended for people who have had or may have contact with someone who has MPV, or for healthcare and public health workers who may be exposed to the virus.

The CDC does not recommend widespread vaccination against MPV at this time. During this outbreak, people who are sexually active are not considered to be at risk for MPV unless their sexual partners have MPV or they have had multiple sexual partners within the past 14 days in areas where MPV cases have been reported.

Can My Pet Get MPV?

MPV is zoonotic, meaning it can spread between animals and people. However, the CDC does not currently believe that MPV poses a high risk to pets. The CDC is continuing to monitor the situation closely. The CDC still recommends that people with MPV avoid interacting with animals and find someone else to take care of their pets while they recover.

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 28, 2022. For more information, contact the AFT Health and Safety Team at 4healthandsafety@aft.org