

# Monkeypox

## Public health advice for gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men

*An outbreak of a disease called monkeypox is currently taking place in many countries that do not typically have cases. This can be concerning, especially for people whose loved ones or community have been affected. Some cases have been identified through sexual health clinics in communities of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men. It is important to note that the risk of monkeypox is not limited to men who have sex with men. Anyone who has close contact with someone who is infectious is at risk. However, given that the virus is being identified in these communities, learning about monkeypox will help ensure that as few people as possible are affected and that the outbreak can be stopped.*

*How to use this document: This document contains information on how monkeypox spreads, what to do if you think you have symptoms and how to protect yourself and others. It can be used by community leaders, influencers, health workers and people attending social events and parties to inform and engage communities of men who have sex with men.*

**Information on this outbreak is changing rapidly as we learn more. Check [who.int](https://www.who.int) for the most up to date information.**

## What you need to know

- An outbreak of a disease called monkeypox is happening in some countries where the virus is not typically found. Some of these cases are being found in communities of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men. Transgender people and gender-diverse people may also be more vulnerable in the context of the current outbreak.
- **Symptoms include:**
  - Rash with blisters on face, hands, feet, eyes, mouth and/or genitals
  - Fever
  - Swollen lymph nodes
  - Headaches
  - Muscle aches
  - Low energy
- You can catch monkeypox if you have close physical contact with someone who is showing symptoms. This includes touching and being face-to-face.
- Monkeypox can spread during close skin-to-skin contact during sex, including kissing, touching, oral and penetrative sex with someone who has symptoms. Avoid having close contact with anyone who has symptoms.
- **Protect yourself and others by:**
  - Isolating at home and talking to a health worker if you have symptoms
  - Avoid skin-to-skin or face-to-face contact, including sexual contact with anyone who has symptoms
  - Clean hands, objects, and surfaces that have been touched regularly
  - Wear a mask if you are in close contact with someone with symptoms

**Stigmatising people because of a disease is never ok.**

**Anyone can get or pass on monkeypox, regardless of their sexuality.**



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## What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is a disease caused by the monkeypox virus. It is commonly found in Central and West Africa and is occasionally identified in other countries. An outbreak is currently taking place in numerous countries that do not typically have cases. It is called monkeypox because it was first detected in monkeys.

## What are the symptoms of monkeypox?

Symptoms of monkeypox typically include a fever, intense headache, muscle aches, back pain, low energy, swollen lymph nodes and a skin rash or lesions. The rash usually begins within one to three days of the start of a fever. Lesions can be flat or slightly raised, filled with clear or yellowish fluid, and can then crust, dry up and fall off. The number of lesions on one person can range from a few to several thousand. The rash tends to be concentrated on the face, palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It can also be found on the mouth, genitals, and eyes. The monkeypox rash can sometimes be mistaken for syphilis or herpes. Symptoms typically last between two to four weeks and go away on their own without treatment. In some individuals, they can lead to medical complications and rarely death. People with underlying immune deficiencies may be at risk of more serious symptoms.

## How does monkeypox spread?

People with monkeypox are infectious while they have symptoms (normally for between two and four weeks). You can catch monkeypox through close physical contact with someone who has symptoms. The rash, bodily fluids (such as fluid, pus or blood from skin lesions) and scabs are particularly infectious. Clothing, bedding, towels or objects like eating utensils/dishes that have been contaminated with the virus from contact with an infected person can also infect others. Ulcers, lesions or sores in the mouth can also be infectious, meaning the virus can spread through saliva. People who closely interact with someone who is infectious, including health workers, household members and sexual partners are therefore at greater risk for infection.

## What should I do if I think I have monkeypox?

If you think you have symptoms or have been a close contact of someone with monkeypox, contact your health worker for advice, testing and medical care. If possible, self-isolate and avoid close contact with others. Take the steps listed above to protect people close to you from becoming infected.

## Can monkeypox spread through sex?

Monkeypox can spread through close skin-to-skin contact during sex, including kissing, touching, oral and penetrative sex with someone who has symptoms. Monkeypox rashes are sometimes found on genitals and in the mouth, which is likely to contribute to transmission during sexual contact. Mouth-to-skin contact could cause transmission where skin or mouth lesions are present. Avoid having close contact with anyone who has symptoms. It is currently not known whether monkeypox can be spread through semen or vaginal fluids. People who have symptoms should avoid sexual contact with others and until we know more, they should continue using condoms after they recover. It can also spread through other types of close contact, not just sex.

## How can I protect myself against monkeypox?

Reduce your risk by avoiding close contact, including sexual contact, with people who have suspected or confirmed monkeypox. If you do need to have close contact with someone who has symptoms, encourage them to self-isolate or cover any skin lesion if they can (e.g., with a light bandage or clothing over the rash). When you are physically close to each other, both of you should wear a medical mask. Avoid skin-to-skin contact whenever possible and use disposable gloves if you have any direct contact with lesions. Regularly clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub, especially after contact with the person who is infected, their clothes, bed sheets, towels and other items or surfaces they have touched, or with which they may have come into contact, their rash or respiratory secretions (e.g., utensils, dishes). Wash clothes, towels and bedsheets and eating utensils with warm water and detergent. Wear a mask when handling any clothes or bedding. Clean and disinfect any contaminated surfaces and dispose of contaminated waste (e.g., dressings) appropriately.

## Some cases in this outbreak have been identified among communities of men who have sex with men. Why is this?

Monkeypox is spread from person to person through close contact. The risk of monkeypox is not limited to men who have sex with men. Anyone who has close contact with someone who is infectious is at risk. One reason we are currently hearing reports of cases of monkeypox from sexual health clinics in communities of men who have sex with men in this outbreak may be because of positive health seeking behaviour in this demographic. Monkeypox rashes can resemble some sexually transmitted diseases, including herpes and syphilis, which may explain why these cases are being picked up at sexual health clinics. It is likely that as we learn more, we may identify cases in the broader community.

## Where can I learn more about monkeypox?

Find answers to some of the most common questions on monkeypox at [who.int](https://www.who.int). Check your local official sources for the situation near you.

If you are having sex with multiple partners, seek regular screening for sexually transmitted infections and take PrEP where it is available. Seeking health advice regularly and quickly, if you have symptoms, will help you get treatment if needed and avoid you infecting anyone else.

**Remember - condoms may not prevent monkeypox but can prevent other sexually transmitted infections.**



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