

## PARISH NURSES NOTES FOR SEPTEMBER 2022

### What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is a rare contagious rash illness caused by the monkeypox virus. The virus is in the same family of viruses as the virus that causes smallpox. Monkeypox causes milder illness than smallpox, but some symptoms can be severe. The monkeypox virus can spread from animals to people and from person to person.

In 2022, a monkeypox outbreak began. There are cases in many countries or areas where this infection is not usually found, including in the [U.S.](#) and in [Virginia](#).

### Who is at risk for monkeypox?

**The risk to the general public is considered low at this time.**

**Anyone can get and spread monkeypox;** however, it is spread by **close contact** with an infected person. Close contact includes touching skin lesions, bodily fluids, or clothing or linens that have been in contact with an infected person. Spread can also occur during prolonged, face-to-face contact.

Monkeypox **can** spread from person to person through:

- Sexual or intimate contact (including oral, anal, and vaginal sex)
- Hugging, kissing, cuddling, and massage
- Sharing a bed, sharing a towel, or sharing clothes that have not been washed

**The highest risk activity at present is sex with multiple or anonymous partners. Avoiding these activities greatly reduces your risk of catching or spreading monkeypox.**

Monkeypox does **not** spread from person to person through:

- Walking by someone who is infected
- Casual conversation with someone infected

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more [information about prevention for people who are sexually active](#), who are at higher risk of exposure.

If you are at risk for contracting monkeypox, visit [VDH's prevention and vaccination website](#) to read more about the vaccines available, who is eligible for the vaccine, and other prevention tips.

## What are the symptoms of monkeypox?

Monkeypox symptoms usually start within 3 weeks of exposure to the virus. For many people, the illness starts with flu-like symptoms that begin a few days before the rash appears. Initial symptoms can include:

- Fever or chills
- Headache
- Muscle aches and backache
- Tiredness
- Swollen lymph nodes

For some people, this rash may be their only symptom. The rash can look like pimples or blisters. It often begins on the genitals or perianal area, or in and around the mouth. In these situations, the monkeypox rash could be confused with a more common sexually transmitted infection (STI). The rash might develop on just one part of the body or can appear on many parts of the body. These lesions might be painful.

Rash lesions go through different stages, shown in the photographs below, before healing. The illness typically lasts 2-4 weeks. People with certain conditions may be more likely to develop severe illness. These include people with weakened immune systems, children under 8 years of age, people with a history of eczema, and people who are pregnant or breastfeeding.



Photo credit: UK Health Security Agency

## **I may have monkeypox. What should I do?**

### **Isolate yourself**

**If you have symptoms, you should separate yourself from other people and pets, cover your lesions, and contact your healthcare provider.** If you do not have a provider, you can contact a public health clinic. **Please call ahead before going to a healthcare facility and let them know that you are concerned about monkeypox.** You may be asked screening questions before you are scheduled for testing. You can use these resources to find a public health clinic:

- [VDH Health Department Locator Tool](#)
- [Federally Qualified Health Center \(FQHC\) Locator Tool](#)
- [STI Resource Connections](#)

If you cannot completely separate yourself from others, you should wear a well-fitting face mask and cover areas where rash or sores are present. CDC has [other recommendations](#) for people who have monkeypox and are isolating at home.

## Get screened for testing

If you have symptoms of monkeypox, contact your healthcare provider immediately for testing, especially if it is possible you were in a setting or situation within the last month where monkeypox is known to spread.

## Explore treatment options

**Not everyone who has symptoms of monkeypox is recommended to take treatments.** Certain antivirals, such as tecovirimat (TPOXX), may be recommended for people who are more likely to get severely ill, like patients with weakened immune systems.

There are no specific treatments for monkeypox virus infections. However, monkeypox and smallpox viruses are similar. This means that treatments developed to protect against smallpox may be used to treat monkeypox virus infections.

Certain antivirals, such as tecovirimat (TPOXX), may be recommended for people who are more likely to get severely ill, like patients with weakened immune systems.

If you have [symptoms](#) of monkeypox, you should talk to your healthcare provider, even if you don't think you have had contact with someone who has monkeypox. VDH is working with healthcare providers to make sure they have information about monkeypox treatment.

Last updated: August 17, 2022