

# 20 QUESTIONS ABOUT MONKEYPOX

## 1. What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is a disease caused by infection with the monkeypox virus.

Monkeypox virus belongs to the Orthopoxvirus genus in the family Poxviridae. This family of viruses includes variola virus (smallpox virus, which has been eradicated), vaccinia virus (used in the smallpox vaccine), cowpox virus, and *Alaskapox* virus.

While generally less severe and much less contagious than smallpox, monkeypox can be a serious illness.

## 2. Is monkeypox a new disease?

No. Monkeypox was first discovered in 1958 in captive monkeys. The natural animal reservoir of monkeypox remains unknown. However, African rodents and non-human primates (like monkeys) may harbor the virus and infect people. A zoonotic disease, monkeypox can be transmitted from animals to humans.

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

## 3. How does monkeypox spread?

Monkeypox does not spread easily between people. Most infections occur from close, personal skin-to-skin contact with someone who has a monkeypox rash.

Transmission is possible through:

- Direct contact with a monkeypox rash, scabs or body fluids from a person with monkeypox.
- Touching objects or fabrics (bedding clothing or towels) or sharing items such as toothbrushes, cups or utensils that have been used by someone with monkeypox.
- Contact with respiratory secretions during prolonged face-to-face contact.

***Monkeypox is NOT spread through casual conversations or by walking past someone with monkeypox like in a grocery store.***

## 4. Should I be worried about monkeypox?

For the general public, the risk of getting monkeypox remains very low. However, monkeypox is now spreading in places where the virus was not commonly seen, like the United States and Europe. Anyone can get monkeypox, so it's important to be aware of the signs and symptoms and how to prevent monkeypox.

## 5. What are the symptoms?

A **rash** is the most common symptom – often located near the genitals or anus but also on the hands, feet, chest, face or mouth. Other symptoms **can include fever, chills, swollen lymph nodes, exhaustion, muscle and backache, headache, sore throat, nasal congestion or cough**. People may experience all or only a few of these symptoms, and they can appear before or after the rash.

## 6. When is monkeypox contagious?

A person with monkeypox can spread it to others from the time symptoms start until the rash has fully healed and a fresh layer of skin has formed. The illness typically lasts 2-4 weeks. Scientists are still trying to determine if the virus can spread from someone who has no symptoms.

## 7. When should individuals get tested for monkeypox?

People who think they have symptoms of monkeypox should visit a health care provider to help them decide if they need to be tested for monkeypox.

## 8. Is monkeypox deadly?

There are two types of monkeypox virus: West African and Congo Basin. Infections identified in the current outbreak are with the West African type, which is rarely fatal.

Over 99% of people who get this form of the disease are likely to survive. However, people with weakened immune systems, children under 8 years of age, people with a history of eczema, and people who are pregnant or breastfeeding may be more likely to get seriously ill or die.

Although the West African type is rarely fatal, the rash can be extremely painful, and people can be left with some permanent scarring.

## 9. Am I at risk of getting monkeypox?

Anyone can get monkeypox, but those who are at higher risk for being exposed to monkeypox include people who:

- People who have been identified by public health officials as a contact of someone with monkeypox
- People who are aware that one of their sexual partners in the past 2 weeks has been diagnosed with monkeypox
- People who had multiple sexual partners in the past 2 weeks in an area with known monkeypox
- People whose jobs may expose them to orthopoxviruses, such as:
  - Laboratory workers who perform testing for orthopoxviruses
  - Laboratory workers who handle cultures or animals with orthopoxviruses
  - Some designated health care or public health workers

The current cases nationally and internationally mainly involve men who have sex with men but also include women and children.

## 10. How can monkeypox be prevented?

To prevent monkeypox:

- Avoid skin-to-skin contact with people who have a rash that looks like monkeypox (i.e. kissing, hugging, snuggling, touching the rash or scabs or having sex).
- Avoid respiratory secretions from prolonged, face-to-face contact with an infected person.
- Avoid contact with objects and materials that a person with monkeypox has used, such as bedding, clothing and towels.
- Do not share personal items such as toothbrushes, cups and utensils with a person with monkeypox.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

For more information, please visit the CDC's prevention webpage: <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/prevention.html>

## 11. Is there a vaccine to prevent monkeypox?

Yes, because monkeypox and smallpox viruses are genetically similar, vaccines developed to protect against smallpox viruses can be used to prevent monkeypox infections.

The preferred vaccine to protect against monkeypox is JYNNEOS, which is a two-dose vaccine. It takes 14 days after getting the second dose of JYNNEOS for its immune protection to reach its maximum.

## 12. Where can I receive the vaccine?

People who live or work in Alaska, are aged 18 years or older and meet eligibility criteria for the vaccine should contact their local [public health center](#) if they wish to be vaccinated.

People currently eligible to receive the vaccine include people who have been exposed to monkeypox and those at higher risk for exposure.

For more details about current vaccine availability and eligibility in Alaska, please visit the Alaska Department of Health [monkeypox webpage](#).

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

The Alaska Department of Health encourages people who have a new or unexplained rash and think they may have had close contact with someone who could have monkeypox in the last 21 days to speak with their health care provider. Testing is widely available; ask your provider if you need to be tested.

## 14. What treatments are available for monkeypox?

If you test positive for monkeypox, ask your health care provider about whether treatment is right for you. Antiviral drugs developed to treat related viral illnesses, such as tecovirimat (TPOXX), may be recommended for people who are more likely to get severely ill, like patients with weakened immune systems.

Most people with monkeypox recover fully within 2 to 4 weeks without the need for medical treatment.

## 15. Should I be concerned about attending a crowded event?

People can get monkeypox if they have close, skin-to-skin contact with someone who has monkeypox. Early indications are that events with activities in which people engage in close, sustained skin-to-skin contact have resulted in cases of monkeypox. If you plan to attend an event, consider how much close, personal, skin-to-skin contact is likely to occur there.

## 16. Is monkeypox a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

Monkeypox spreads through close or intimate physical contact, including sexual contact, especially when touching rashes of someone who has monkeypox. Transmission may also occur when objects (like bedding) are contaminated with the virus. Scientists are still investigating whether the virus could be spread by exposure to semen or vaginal fluids, but this has not been previously known to be how the virus spreads.

In the current outbreak, monkeypox is spreading through sexual contact, but it's important to remember that monkeypox is spread in many nonsexual ways. While helpful for STI prevention, condoms are generally not sufficient to prevent monkeypox transmission.

## 17. How can a person lower their risk during sex?

Vaccination is an important tool in preventing the spread of monkeypox for people who have been exposed to monkeypox and people who may be more likely to get monkeypox. People at higher risk may also want to temporarily reduce or avoid behaviors that may increase your risk of monkeypox exposure.

- Talk with any sexual partners about monkeypox symptoms and be aware of any new or unexplained rashes or lesions, including in the genital area or inside the mouth.
- If you or a partner has or recently had monkeypox symptoms, or either of you have a new or unexplained rash anywhere, avoid sex or being intimate until you've seen a health care provider.
- Do not share things like towels, clothing and toothbrushes.
- Limit your number of sexual partners to reduce your likelihood of exposure.
- Exchange contact information with any new partner to allow for sexual health follow-up, if needed.

## 18. What does monkeypox look like?

Please visit [the CDC webpage](#) for photos of monkeypox rashes.



## 19. Is monkeypox related to COVID-19?

No, monkeypox is a completely different disease, is not related to COVID-19 and spreads differently. Monkeypox is spread primarily through prolonged, skin-to-skin contact. This is much different from COVID-19, which spreads easily through the air.

## 20. Does the monkeypox virus have variants?

All viruses change and evolve over time. However, the monkeypox virus is a DNA virus which mutates slower than coronaviruses, which are RNA viruses. The monkeypox viruses currently spreading outside of Africa are descended from the group of monkeypox viruses primarily found in West Africa. These monkeypox viruses tend to cause less severe disease than the monkeypox viruses that are found in the Congo Basin.

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[health.alaska.gov/  
dph/Epi/id/Pages/  
Monkeypox.aspx](https://health.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/Monkeypox.aspx)



**CDC**

[cdc.gov/monkeypox](https://cdc.gov/monkeypox)

