



Frequently asked questions about Alaskapox virus

- **What is Alaskapox virus?**

Alaskapox virus is an orthopox virus that was first discovered in 2015 in a woman who lived near Fairbanks. As of December 2023, six more infections in people have been reported. This virus belongs to a group of viruses called orthopoxviruses. These viruses infect mammals and cause skin lesions.

- **What are the signs and symptoms of Alaskapox virus?**

People with Alaskapox have had one or more skin lesions (see photos below) and other symptoms like swollen lymph nodes and joint or muscle pain. Several Alaskapox patients initially thought they had a spider or insect bite. Nearly all patients had mild illnesses that resolved on their own after a few weeks. There has been one patient with an immunocompromising condition that developed severe disease and died after prolonged illness.

- **Where is Alaskapox virus found?**

Six of the known infections occurred in people who lived in the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) and one infection occurred in a person who lived in the Kenai Peninsula Borough. While animal trapping studies have confirmed the presence of the virus in small mammals in FNSB, it is likely that the virus is present more broadly in Alaska's small mammals and that more infections in humans have occurred but were not identified. More animal testing is occurring to better understand the distribution of the virus in animal populations throughout Alaska.

- **Where does the virus come from?**

We believe that Alaskapox virus primarily occurs in small mammals. Through two rounds of small mammal sampling conducted in 2020 and 2021, the presence of the Alaskapox virus has been confirmed in two specific species within the Fairbanks North Star Borough: red-backed voles and shrews. However, evidence also suggests the virus is present in various other small mammal species in Alaska and its prevalence extends to areas outside of the Fairbanks North Star Borough. We are not sure exactly how the virus spreads from animals to people but contact with small mammals and potentially domestic pets who come into contact small wild mammals could play a role.

- **Can people with Alaskapox infect other people?**

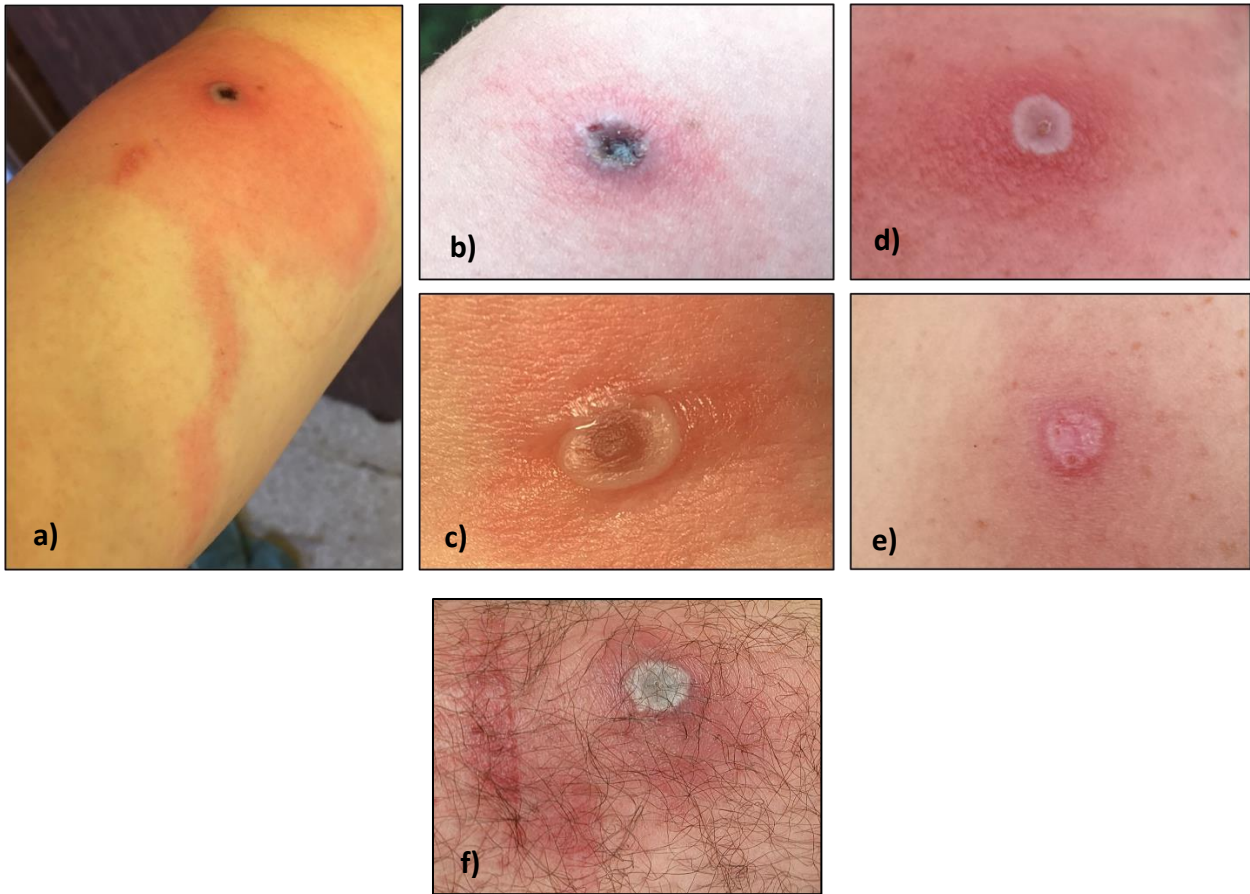
While human-to-human transmission of AKPV has not yet been observed, some orthopoxviruses can spread by direct contact with lesions (particularly broken skin contact with lesion secretions). Therefore, we advise individuals with skin lesions potentially caused by Alaskapox to keep the affected area covered with a bandage and avoid sharing bedding or other linens that have come into contact with the lesion.

- **What should I do if I think I have Alaskapox?**

Talk to a health care provider. They can assess whether your symptoms might be caused by Alaskapox or something else. Keep the lesion covered and avoid touching it.

- **What should health care providers do if they think a patient may have Alaskapox?**

If you suspect Alaskapox virus infection and have not identified an alternative diagnosis, contact the Alaska Section of Epidemiology at 907-269-8000 to facilitate testing and treatment (if warranted). Advise the patient to keep the lesion covered with a bandage. Take photos of the lesion.



a): An Alaskapox lesion about 10 days after symptom onset. b): Close-up of same lesion (a) about 12 days after symptom onset. c): An Alaskapox lesion about 5 days after symptom onset; the lesion was about 1.2 cm across. d): An Alaskapox lesion about 5 days after symptom onset; this lesion was about 1 cm across. e): The same lesion as above (d), about 4 weeks after symptom onset. f): An Alaskapox lesion around the reported symptom onset date.



An Alaskapox lesion from an immunocompromised patient about 3 days after symptom onset (left) and about 8 weeks after symptom onset (right) with the area of lesion swelling measuring about 22 x 11 cm.