

Monkeypox virus and monkeypox disease



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



Monkeypox infection is a notifiable condition¹

How Monkeypox is spread

Monkeypox is a zoonosis (spread to humans from animals). Spread from humans to animals occurs primarily in tropical rainforest areas of Central and West Africa, via contact with animals such as rodents or eating wild game. There is no evidence of spread from animals to humans in Australia.

In May 2022, a global outbreak of monkeypox began, with cases identified in many countries. In this outbreak, monkeypox has been spreading mainly from person-to-person through very close contact with infected people, such as skin-to-skin contact during intimate or sexual contact.

Monkeypox mainly spreads through direct contact with infected body fluids, lesions or scabs on the skin. It can also spread through prolonged contact with respiratory droplets (from coughing, sneezing, breathing and speaking) and contact with contaminated materials or objects, such as contaminated clothing, towels or linen.

While this mode of transmission means that anyone can acquire or transmit monkeypox, a large proportion of cases in the 2022 outbreak have affected men who have sex with men. Risk factors include attendance at sex on premises venues or other events that involve sexual or intimate contact with a large number of people.

Signs and symptoms

Monkeypox infection usually causes symptoms including:

- > Fever
- > Headache
- > Muscle aches and backache
- > Swollen lymph nodes
- > Chills
- > Exhaustion
- > Rash.

1-3 days after the first symptoms occur, the person develops a rash, often beginning on one part of the body before spreading to other parts. The rash can vary from isolated lesions to several thousand lesions and goes through different stages.

The signs and symptoms in the 2022 outbreak have had some differences from the disease found in Central and West Africa including:

- > The rash may be the first symptom that develops (prior to any other symptoms of illness).
- > The rash may develop on the genital area first and may not spread to other areas.
- > The person may develop rectal pain and discharge (“proctitis”) as the first sign of local lesions developing.

Monkeypox will usually resolve in a few weeks. Complications from monkeypox are more common in the very young, pregnant women and persons with impaired immune systems.



Image sourced from Monkeypox: background information - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Diagnosis

Anyone developing symptoms that may be consistent with monkeypox should seek medical care, wearing a mask and calling ahead to make sure they can be isolated away from others.

Where a doctor suspects monkeypox based on the person's symptoms, a swab of the rash will be taken to confirm the diagnosis by laboratory testing.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Usually 1 to 2 weeks but can range from 5 to 21 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

The person is considered infectious while they have symptoms and until all of the lesions have crusted, dried or fallen off and new skin has grown.

Treatment

As most cases of monkeypox are mild, medical treatment is not usually required. Treatment aims to reduce symptoms. Someone with mild monkeypox symptoms may only need simple pain medicines, such as paracetamol, and to stay hydrated. If an infected person's symptoms are more severe, they may need supportive management such as intravenous fluids and medicine to control fever or pain.

For people with compromised immune systems at greater risk of serious illness, treatments are currently under investigation.

Prevention

Infections with monkeypox virus can be prevented by the following measures:

- > People with monkeypox should self-isolate away from other people and pet rodents until all of their sores have healed and new skin has grown.
- > People caring for or having contact with someone who has monkeypox should wear personal protective equipment (PPE) including gloves and surgical mask.
- > Practise good hand hygiene after contact with people with monkeypox. Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- > Avoid contact with any materials, such as bedding, that have been in contact with an infected person.
- > As it is currently unclear whether viable virus may be present in semen after recovery, people who have had monkeypox should use condoms when having sex for 8 weeks after they come out of isolation.

- > People who have sex while travelling or attend venues or events where intimate contact with a large number of people occurs should be aware of the risk of monkeypox. Although condoms are recommended, these are not fully protective as any skin-on-skin contact with an infected person poses a transmission risk.
- > People travelling to countries in Central and West Africa where monkeypox is known to be present should avoid contact with sick animals (dead or alive) that could harbour monkeypox virus, including rodents, primates and should refrain from eating or handling wild game (bush meat).

Immunisation

Monkeypox is vaccine-preventable; however, the global supply of vaccines against monkeypox is currently limited and potential side-effects need to be weighted carefully against the risk of infection and the risk of severe disease. SA Health guidance will be updated in accordance with the local epidemiological situation when vaccine is available locally.

1 – In South Australia the law requires doctors and laboratories to report some infections or diseases to SA Health. These infections or diseases are commonly referred to as 'notifiable conditions'.

Useful links

SA Health website

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

- > Hand hygiene
- > Protecting yourself and your health whilst travelling overseas
- > When you have a notifiable condition

Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care website

www.health.gov.au

- > [Monkeypox \(MPX\)](#)
- > [ATAGI clinical guidance on vaccination against Monkeypox](#)
- > [Interim infection prevention and control guidance on Monkeypox for health workers](#)
- > [CDNA national guidelines for public health units](#)

You've Got What? 5th Edition

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The SA Health Disclaimer for this resource is located at www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat

Official

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