



Public Health Brief

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Monkeypox – NOT COVID!

Current situation:

To date, WHO has recorded more than 90 cases of monkeypox in a dozen countries including Canada, Spain, Israel, France, Switzerland, the U.S. and Australia.

On Monday, Denmark announced its first case, Portugal revised its total upwards to 37, Italy reported one further infection and Britain added 37 more cases.

U.S. health officials said today they are regarding eight cases as being confirmed, including cases in Massachusetts, New York, Utah, and Florida. Most were men who had traveled outside the U.S., and most were gay, bisexual, or were males having sex with other men (MSM), usually with multiple sexual partners. Undoubtedly there will be more cases, including in California, where a suspect case in Sacramento is currently being evaluated.

Germany has four confirmed cases linked to exposure at “party events ... where sexual activity took place” in Spain’s Canary Islands and in Berlin. Madrid’s senior health official said Monday that the Spanish capital had 30 confirmed cases. Authorities are investigating possible links between a recent Gay Pride event in the Canary Islands, which drew some 80,000 people, and cases at a Madrid sauna.

Who is at risk of “catching it”?

Transmission of monkeypox virus typically occurs when a person comes into contact with the virus from an animal, human, or materials contaminated with the virus. The virus enters the body through broken skin (even if not visible), respiratory tract, or the mucous membranes (eyes, nose, or mouth). Respiratory droplets generally cannot travel more than a few feet, so prolonged face-to-face contact is required.



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On Monday, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control Director Andrea Ammon said “the likelihood of further spread of the virus through close contact, for example during sexual activities among persons with multiple sexual partners, is considered to be high.”

Dr. David Heymann, who formerly headed WHO’s emergencies department, has stated that the leading theory to explain the spread of the disease was sexual transmission at raves held in Spain and Belgium. “We know monkeypox can spread when there is close contact with the lesions of someone who is infected, and it looks like sexual contact has now amplified that transmission,” said Heymann.

That marks a significant departure from the disease’s typical pattern of spread in central and western Africa, where people are mainly infected by animals like wild rodents and primates and outbreaks have not spilled across borders.

Health officials say most of the known cases in Europe have been among men who have sex with men, but anyone can be infected through intimate and close skin-to-skin contact with a sick person, their shared towels, clothing or bedsheets. Scientists say it will be difficult to disentangle whether the spread is being driven by sex or merely close contact. By nature, sexual activity involves intimate contact, which one would expect to increase the likelihood of transmission, whatever a person’s sexual orientation and irrespective of the mode of transmission.

Of note, there have been no cases among contacts on airline flights. There is a report of one healthcare worker contracting an infection, as well as 2 family members of documented cases.

Bottom line – monkeypox is not easily transmitted.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of Monkeypox usually include fever, headache, muscle aches, backache, swollen lymph nodes chills, and exhaustion. Within 1 to 3 days (sometimes longer) after the appearance of fever, the patient develops a rash, often beginning on the face then spreading to other parts of the body, including the mouth, palms of the hands, and soles of the feet. It is very painful, and eventually becomes very itchy. Sometimes it only appears in the genital or perianal area.

The incubation period (time from infection to symptoms) for monkeypox is usually 7–14 days but can range from 5–21 days. The illness typically lasts for 2–4 weeks. A person is considered contagious until the lesions scab over or the scabs fall off.



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How bad is it?

The monkeypox cases so far have been mild, with no deaths reported. Typically, the virus causes fever, chills, rash and lesions on the face or genitals. Most people recover within several weeks without requiring hospitalization. In recent years, the illness has been fatal in up to 6% of infections. However, evidence is that the current strain originated in West Africa rather than Central Africa and is not as lethal.

There was no evidence to suggest that monkeypox had mutated into a more infectious form. The disease is unlikely to trigger widespread transmission. **This is not COVID and does not have the potential to be a pandemic.** Vaccines to protect against infection and antiviral medications to treat infection are available via consultation with the local health department.

For more information regarding Monkeypox visit <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/index.html>

For those of you interested in all the technical details, go to:

[Monkeypox multi-country outbreak \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/monkeypox)

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