

# MONKEYPOX: WHAT WORKERS NEED TO KNOW



## WHAT IS MONKEYPOX?

Monkeypox is a disease of growing concern that is caused by infection from the same family of viruses that cause smallpox with symptoms that are similar, but less severe. Monkeypox is rarely fatal and is not related to chickenpox.

## HOW DOES MONKEYPOX SPREAD?

Monkeypox can spread to anyone through close, personal, often skin-to-skin contact including:

- Direct or indirect contact with body fluids or lesions (rash or scabs);
- Scientists are researching if the virus can be spread when someone has no symptoms.
- Contact with objects, fabrics (clothing, bedding, bandages, towels), and surfaces that have been used by someone with monkeypox;
- Under study: whether the virus can spread through semen, vaginal fluids, urine, or feces.
- Exposure to respiratory secretions during prolonged face-to-face contact.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says it is unclear how often the virus spreads through “respiratory secretions,” like coughing or sneezing.
- A pregnant person can spread the virus to her fetus through the placenta.
- Monkeypox can also spread from animals to human and human to animals through close contact.

## WHAT IS THE RISK OF WORKPLACE EXPOSURE?

Workplace spread of monkeypox has not been reported yet but as the disease increases in the community, some jobs that may carry a risk of exposure to monkeypox are in healthcare (direct patient care, laboratories, home health care), and in laundry and janitorial/housekeeping services. Healthcare workers should follow recommendations in [Infection Control: Healthcare Settings | Monkeypox | Poxvirus | CDC.](#)

The CDC’s [‘Considerations for Reducing Monkeypox Transmission in Congregate Living Settings’](#) applies to facilities where people who are not related live close to one another. These include correctional and detention facilities, homeless shelters, group homes, dormitories at institutes of higher education, seasonal worker housing, residential substance use treatment facilities, and other similar settings.”

# WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Monkeypox can cause flu-like symptoms and a rash that usually appear up to 3 weeks after exposure to the virus.

- A rash, maybe with painful or itchy pimples or blisters, on or near the genitals (penis, testicles, labia, and vagina) or anus (butthole) and could be on other areas like the hands, feet, chest, face, or mouth.
- Fever; chills; swollen lymph nodes; exhaustion; muscle aches and backache; headache; and respiratory symptoms (e.g., sore throat, nasal congestion, or cough).

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 researching if the virus can spread when someone has no symptoms.

# HOW CAN WORKERS BE PROTECTED FROM MONKEYPOX?

Anyone in close personal contact with a person with monkeypox can get infected and should take steps to protect themselves. Whether the virus can be spread by someone who has no symptoms is not known yet.

Workers in jobs that may expose them to the virus should demand their employers develop an monkeypox prevention plan. The plan should be developed with worker input and include:

- Potential sources of monkeypox exposure;
- Measures to reduce contact with people or materials potentially exposed to the monkeypox;
- Steps to take if an employee has monkeypox (including paid time off),
- While there are no laws that currently require employers to provide paid leave for monkeypox specifically, several states and local jurisdictions have paid sick leave requirements; these laws may cover absences related to monkeypox.
- Notification process concerning co-workers exposed to monkeypox;
- If an employee has had close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with monkeypox or exposed to an environment contaminated with the virus, they should monitor themselves closely for monkeypox symptoms up to the three weeks that it may take for them to appear.
- Training on monkeypox and on the prevention plan.

Some specific prevention measures include:

- In healthcare settings, isolate infected patients from others who could be at risk for infection.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) when caring for patients and touching materials such as linens or cleaning surfaces that may have been exposed to monkeypox .
- Wash hands often and with soap, for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol).

# WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS FOR MONKEYPOX?

Most people with monkeypox recover fully within 2 to 4 weeks without the need for medical treatment. Currently, there are no treatments specifically for monkeypox infections. However, antiviral medications for smallpox may prove to be helpful in treating monkeypox infections. Tecovirimat (TPOXX), a treatment approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for smallpox, may be recommended for people who are more likely to get severely ill, such as patients with weakened immune systems.

# ARE THERE VACCINES TO PROTECT AGAINST MONKEYPOX?

Although there is a vaccine that was developed for smallpox, it is not known how well it protects against monkeypox when given in advance of exposure or following exposure and for how long.

The CDC does not recommend widespread vaccination against MPV at this time. Vaccination before exposure to the monkeypox virus is recommended for people in certain occupational risk groups, such as certain laboratory and healthcare workers.

Vaccination after known or presumed exposure (ideally within 4 days) is for people who have been exposed to monkeypox and people who may be more likely to get monkeypox (people with certain risk factors and recent experiences that make them more likely to have been exposed).

The preferred vaccine is JYNNEOS, which is given in two doses and it takes 14 days after the second dose to reach maximum protection. ACAM2000 is a single-dose alternative vaccine that takes four weeks after vaccination for maximum protection, and has the potential for more side effects.

According to the CDC, because of limitations in our knowledge about the effectiveness of vaccines, workers should protect themselves from infection by avoiding close, skin-to-skin contact with someone who has monkey pox.

**WE ALL HAVE A RIGHT TO A SAFE WORKPLACE.  
TOGETHER, WE CAN PROTECT EACH OTHER, OUR  
CO-WORKERS AND OUR FAMILIES.**

If you have questions or need more information,  
please contact us at [info@NationalCOSH.org](mailto:info@NationalCOSH.org).

**Sources:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; New York State Dept of Health [NYSDOH]; American Federation of Teachers; International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

