

hMPXV: Frequently asked Questions

Information about the virus

What is hMPXV?

hMPXV is an abbreviation for human monkeypox virus. hMPXV is a DNA virus related to smallpox. It infects animals and is endemic to forested areas of Central and West Africa. It's unclear what animals act as a reservoir for hMPXV, but rodents are the prime suspects. The virus can also infect rats, squirrels, prairie dogs and some monkeys, among other animals. The first human case was identified in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There are two strains of hMPXV: MPXV-1 is typically more severe and has a case fatality rate of up to 10%. MPXV-2 causes milder illness, with an estimated case fatality rate in endemic countries of around 1%.

Is it similar to smallpox?

It's in the same group of viruses, but this isn't smallpox. hMPXV is much harder to catch, and it is not as severe. There are two strains of this virus, and the main one that's circulating now causes milder disease. Most people are recovering at home without any special treatment.

Are there any cases in Oregon?

As of July 13, 11 cases of hMPXV have been reported in Oregon since June 16, 2022. They are among more than 1,000 cases in 43 U.S. states and 11,000 cases in 65 countries that are considered to be part of the current global outbreak. CDC is urging health care providers in the U.S. to be alert for patients who have rash illnesses consistent with hMPXV, regardless of whether they have travel or specific risk factors for the virus, and regardless of gender or sexual orientation. CDC also is working with state and local health officials to identify people who may have been in contact with people who have tested positive for hMPXV so they can monitor their health.

Who is most at risk of infection?

While anyone can be affected by hMPXV, the current global outbreak of the virus happens to largely affect gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men. As such, OHA is prioritizing the empowerment of men who have sex with men and the larger LGBTQIA+ and queer community with information, testing, prevention and treatment strategies so they can take steps to protect themselves from the virus.

Why is it called monkeypox?

It got its name because the first recognized outbreak was in monkeys in a Danish laboratory in 1958. However, the name “monkeypox” as it relates to the current and more recent outbreak is misleading, in that the natural hosts are rodents, not non-human primates. Consistent with statements issued by the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, and to reduce the stigma associated with the name of the virus, OHA is using hMPXV to refer to this virus and the infection it causes.

How is it spread?

Historically, people have become infected by handling wild animals and bush meat, although hMPXV is also transmitted person to person. This can happen through prolonged, close contact, either skin to skin, contact with fluid from hMPXV lesions, or less commonly from large respiratory droplets. Most infections in the current outbreak appear to be due to skin-to-skin contact.

Can hMPXV spread through the air?

An ill person who coughs or sneezes on someone else could possibly spread the infection. However, most transmission in the current outbreak appears to be from prolonged, skin-to-skin contact.

What are the symptoms?

Illness typically starts with fever, headache and muscle aches. This is followed in one to three days by a rash, often on the face, spreading to the limbs. The rash starts with flat patches that then form large, firm bumps, which then fill with fluid or pus. These then scab and fall off, usually over two to four weeks.

How long after exposure do symptoms start?

Usually within seven to 14 days, with a range of five to 21 days.

When can a person ill with hMPXV spread it to others?

Ill people can potentially transmit the infection from when symptoms start until the rash has resolved. However, this is not an easy infection to catch. It typically requires prolonged, close, skin-to-skin contact. People at increased risk include sexual partners of an ill person, or family members and health care workers caring for someone ill with hMPXV.

Can the virus spread before someone knows they're sick?

There have been no reports of the spreading before symptoms develop.

Is hMPXV a sexually transmitted disease?

The virus spreads through close, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact, not sex specifically. Though risk of infection is not high, anyone who has close, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with someone ill with hMPXV could possibly catch it.

Who is most at risk for HMPXV?

A lot of the infections in the current outbreak are from skin-to-skin contact, typically during sexual activity. People who have multiple partners, particularly ones they don't know or who have been in areas with larger numbers of cases, seem to be at higher risk. Many of the infections in the current outbreak have been among men who have sex with men.

What if I think I have hMPXV?

Call your health care provider to let them know. If you don't have a health care provider, reach out to your local public health authority, which can see you in one of its clinics or help you find a health care provider. If you plan to go to the emergency room or an urgent care, let the check-in staff know that you are concerned about hMPXV. They will ask you to wear a mask and help you cover rashes that may not be covered by your clothing while you wait to be seen.

Information about the current outbreak

Which strain is causing the current outbreak?

MPXV-2, which tends to be the less severe of the two hMPXV strains, is responsible for the illnesses in the current outbreak.

Are we seeing typical symptoms in this outbreak?

Many people in the current outbreak have not had typical symptoms. Many have had no symptoms prior to developing a rash, which has often been a localized rash in the genital or perianal areas.

Anything else unusual about this outbreak?

It is unusual that most of those with hMPXV haven't traveled to areas where the virus typically circulates. This suggests some transmission in countries that don't usually experience it. Most of the cases in Oregon had no history of travel to communities where the virus is circulating.

Could hMPXV spill over from people into domestic and wild animals in the U.S. and become endemic?

It's theoretically possible but considered to be a very low risk. In a previous U.S. outbreak of hMPXV in 2003, 47 people were infected via pet prairie dogs housed with hMPXV-infected rodents from Ghana. All 47 human cases were directly linked to the infected pet prairie dogs. Although health investigators did extensive testing of other domestic and exposed animals, they found no evidence of spread to animals.

Response to the current outbreak

Are there vaccines for hMPXV?

There is a vaccine specifically for hMPXV and smallpox called Jynneos. It could be used to protect people with high-risk exposure to someone ill with hMPXV. There is another vaccine, ACAM2000, that is approved to prevent smallpox. It could be used under special arrangements with CDC, but it is more likely to cause adverse effects.

How are vaccines for hMPXV being used right now?

Vaccines are being used to protect people who have known exposure to someone ill with hMPXV infection. Vaccination actually works to prevent or

decrease disease even after someone was exposed. In the coming weeks, vaccine will also be used to prevent disease in people at increased risk of exposure to hMPXV.

Should I vaccinate my kids against it now?

No. No vaccine is needed at this point. Vaccines would be used to protect people who have known exposure to someone ill with hMPXV infection.

How is OHA responding to the outbreak?

OHA is working with local public health authorities, tribes, and community partners to share information about hMPXV, the outbreak, and infection prevention strategies with people who might be at increased risk of infection.

OHA also is sharing information with clinicians about the outbreak, how to recognize and test for hMPXV illness, and how to prevent spread.

Additional activities:

- OHA provided information to the public about symptoms and risk factors of hMPXV infection, and to seek care if these develop.
- The Oregon State Public Health Lab is conducting initial testing and arranging confirmatory testing for hMPXV through CDC.
- OHA has received limited allocations of vaccine and medications for prevention and treatment of hMPXV from CDC over recent weeks. However, few people who have become ill during this outbreak have needed treatment.