

UCU on monkeypox

What is monkeypox?

It is a viral disease that comes from the same family of viruses that cause smallpox. It usually affects rodents and primates in rainforest areas of west and central Africa and is sometimes transmitted to humans. There has recently been an increase in cases in the UK. The symptoms are less severe than smallpox, it is very rarely fatal or serious and is not related to chickenpox.

Symptoms:

According to the **NHS (www.nhs.uk)** If you get infected with monkeypox, it usually takes between five and 21 days for the first symptoms to appear.

The first symptoms of monkeypox include:

- a high temperature
- a headache
- muscle aches
- backache
- swollen glands
- shivering (chills)
- exhaustion
- joint pain.

A rash usually appears one to five days after the first symptoms. The rash often begins on the face, then spreads to other parts of the body. This can include the mouth, genitals and anus.

You may also have anal pain or bleeding from your bottom.

The rash is sometimes confused with chickenpox. It starts as raised spots, which turn into small blisters filled with fluid. These blisters eventually form scabs which later fall off.

The symptoms usually clear up in a few weeks. While you have symptoms, you can pass monkeypox on to other people.

How does monkeypox spread?

Monkeypox is 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 faeces
- exposure to respiratory secretions during prolonged face-to-face contact
- unclear: if virus spreads through 'respiratory secretions' like coughing or sneezing
- a pregnant woman can spread the virus to her foetus through the placenta
- can spread from animals to human and human to animals through close contact.

Workplace exposure

As the disease spreads in our communities then some jobs may carry a higher risk of exposure such as healthcare, laundry, housekeeping, cleaning and other close contact work with other people or with objects. Check that your employer is following the latest UKHSA guidance on personal protective equipment. See **Principles for monkeypox control in the UK: 4 nations consensus statement**

Workers in jobs that may expose them to the virus should demand their employers carry out a Control of Substances Hazardous to health (COSHH) risk assessment (RA) to identify, assess and control risks of infection. Any COSHH RA should include contracted staff who need to enter and clean isolation rooms or handle laundry or other contaminated objects.

Make sure the employer has individually assessed those at greater risk of contracting or becoming seriously ill from monkeypox, including pregnant staff and those who are immunocompromised.

If a staff member contracts the virus request that the employer complete a Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Danger Occurrences (RIDDOR):

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/>. Or Report an incident | Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland: <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/report-incident>

Any risk assessment should include:

- using a hierarchy of control approach to control infection risks
- if there is an outbreak can the work activity stop, if not can it be done remotely, if not introduce distancing, enhanced cleaning, PPE

- potential sources of monkeypox exposure
- measures to reduce contact with people or materials potentially exposed to monkeypox
- steps to take if an employee has monkeypox (including paid sick leave and paid time off to isolate)
- any response from the employer must be to identify and notify persons who have been exposed to the virus and for them to isolate and monitor any symptoms up to three weeks
- in jobs where there is a higher risk of infection then precautionary approach must include use of PPE to prevent infection.

Other information:

According to the **Terrence Higgins Trust (tth.org.uk)**:

- 'health protection teams are getting in touch with close contacts of anyone diagnosed with monkeypox. They will advise you what to do if you do not have symptoms
- there is a global shortage of the smallpox vaccine being used to protect against monkeypox and the UK's supply is running low ahead of 100,000 doses arriving from late September
- fractional dosing of the vaccine using intradermal vaccination is being initially piloted at three sites. This is to maximise supply and protect as many people as possible while offering the same level of protection.'

Planning events or mass gatherings

With reference to **Monkeypox: planning events and mass gatherings - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)** 'event organisers should ensure information is available on safe behaviours for attendees, and that they have plans in place for the safe management of suspected cases and their contacts. Event communications should reinforce the message that the following individuals should not attend the event – those who:

- have received a confirmed or highly probable diagnosis of monkeypox, and who are currently isolating
- have symptoms compatible with monkeypox'.

UK government advice for those self isolating

Monkeypox: people who are isolating at home - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Cases across the UK are now being reported weekly: **Monkeypox outbreak: epidemiological overview - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)**. Up to the time of writing there were 3,439 confirmed and 146 highly probable monkeypox cases in the UK: 3,585 in total. Of these, 93 were in Scotland, 34 were in Northern Ireland, 46 were in Wales and 3,412 were in England.

Monkeypox cases confirmed in England – latest updates - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Monkeypox - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

Who is most at risk?

No-one should be complacent about the infection risks.

Where people live in close contact i.e. prisons, student accommodation, then there will be a risk of transmission if someone is infected. **Monkeypox: prisons and places of detention - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).**

Reports have come through STD clinics which has flagged up a disproportionately high proportion of msm (men who have sex with men) who have contracted monkeypox. It is possible that this way of reporting has given rise to data showing relatively higher risk for msm.

Universities are only just starting to look at producing guidance for students. In the US 10 Universities have announced outbreaks.

On 23 July 2022, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared monkeypox a '*public health emergency of international concern*'. In doing so WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that '*stigma and discrimination can be as dangerous as any virus. But with the tools we have right now, we can stop transmission and bring this outbreak under control.*'

22 September 2022