

# Frequently Asked Questions About Monkeypox

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## Basics

### What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox (MPX) is a disease caused by infection with the MPX virus. Cases have been reported in the United States where it isn't usually found. MPX infection can make you sick, often with flu-like symptoms and a rash that can look like pimples or blisters. MPX illness is similar to smallpox though less severe and rarely fatal. For the general public, the current risk of getting MPX is low.

### Who is at risk of getting MPX?

For the general public, the risk of getting MPX is low. Current cases have been reported most frequently among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM) who have multiple or unknown sexual partners. However, MPX can spread to anyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, through close, personal, or skin-to-skin contact. Anyone in close personal contact with a person with MPX can get it and should take steps to protect themselves.

### How many cases of MPX have been identified in Maryland?

MPX case counts are updated weekly on the [Maryland Human MPX Summary dashboards](#).

## Symptoms

### What are the symptoms of MPX?

The most common symptom of MPX is a rash. Symptoms can also include a flu-like illness such as fever, headache, muscle aches, backache, swollen lymph nodes, chills, sore throat, nasal congestion, cough, and fatigue. For some people, MPX begins with flu-like symptoms before the rash develops. Other people get the rash first, followed by flu-like symptoms. Others experience only the rash. MPX can be spread from the time symptoms start until the rash has fully healed and a fresh layer of skin has formed.

### What does MPX rash look like and how long does it last?

MPX [rash can look like pimples, sores, or blisters](#) and may appear on the hands, feet, chest, face, penis, testicles, or inside or on the mouth, labia, vagina, and anus. The rash may be painful or itchy. It may go through several stages, including scabs, before completely healing with a fresh layer of skin forming. This typically lasts 2-4 weeks.

### What should I do if I have symptoms of MPX?

If you have a new or unexplained rash, sores, or other MPX [symptoms](#), you should talk to your healthcare provider right away. When you talk to your healthcare provider, remind them that the MPX virus is circulating in the community. Avoid close contact with anyone, including intimate physical contact and sex, until you have talked to a healthcare provider and while you wait for test results. If you don't have a healthcare provider or health insurance, [visit the Maryland Department of Health website to find a health department near you](#).

## Spread

### How does MPX spread?

MPX spreads in different ways. It can spread to anyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, through:

- Direct contact with the infectious rash, scabs, or body fluids
- Respiratory secretions during prolonged, face-to-face contact, or during intimate physical contact, such as kissing, cuddling, or sex
- Touching items like as clothing and linens that previously touched the infectious rash or body fluids
- A pregnant person spreading the virus to their fetus through the placenta
- Infected animals (either by being scratched or bitten by the animal or by preparing or eating meat or using products from an infected animal)

MPX can spread 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.

### Does MPX spread through casual contact?

MPX hasn't been shown to spread through casual contact, like being in the same area, having casual conversation, or briefly touching shared items like doorknobs. Sharing items such as gym equipment or chairs is unlikely to expose people to MPX.

### Can MPX spread through shared towels and linens?

It is possible for MPX to be spread by sharing materials, such as towels, bedding, and clothing used by someone with MPX. It can also be spread through sharing items such as utensils, cups, and cigarettes/vape pens. It's important to not share these items. You can find more information at [CDC: Disinfecting Home and Other Non-healthcare Settings](#).

### What should I do if I have MPX?

If a healthcare provider tells you that you have MPX, follow the treatment and prevention recommendations from the provider. Avoid close contact with anyone, including intimate physical contact and sex, until all sores have healed and you have a fresh layer of skin formed. You may be asked about the people you have had close, personal, or sexual contact with within the last 21 days. This is to help stop the spread of MPX. If you don't have a healthcare provider or health insurance, [visit the Maryland Department of Health website to find a health department near you](#). For more information, visit [CDC: Isolation and Prevention Practices for People with Monkeypox](#).

## Testing and Treatment

### Can I get tested for MPX?

If you have [symptoms](#) of MPX, you should contact your healthcare provider, even if you think you have not had contact with someone with MPX. If you don't have a healthcare provider or health insurance, [visit the Maryland Department of Health website to find a health department near you](#). Healthcare providers who suspect human MPX in a patient can order testing directly through some commercial laboratories. Healthcare providers should educate patients on [home isolation](#) while test results are pending.

### Are treatments available for MPX?

There are no treatments specifically for MPX virus infection. However, antiviral drugs developed to protect against smallpox may be used to treat or prevent MPX.

- For treatment, an antiviral drug called [Tecovirimat \(TPOXX\)](#) may be recommended for patients at risk of severe illness from MPX virus infection, such as those with a weakened immune system.
- A vaccine called [JYNNEOS](#) has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for protection against the MPX virus in people who have been exposed to MPX and people who are more likely to get MPX. Vaccination is currently not recommended for the general public for the prevention of MPX. At this time, the supply of JYNNEOS is extremely limited.

Human MPX treatments and vaccines aren't available directly through routine providers, but can be coordinated through the health department. Healthcare providers will talk to their patients about recommended treatment. If you don't have a healthcare provider or health insurance, [visit the Maryland Department of Health website to find a health department near you.](#)

## Prevention

### What can be done to prevent MPX?

There are a number of ways to help prevent MPX infection.

- Avoid direct contact with rashes, sores, or scabs on a person with MPX, including during close, personal, or skin-to-skin contact, such as sexual activity. *Health experts believe this is currently the most common way that MPX is spreading in the United States.*
- Do not handle or touch the bedding, towels, or clothing of a person with MPX.
- Do not share utensils, cups, cigarettes, or vape pens with a person with MPX.
- Avoid contact with respiratory droplets or saliva through kissing and other close, prolonged face-to-face contact from a person with MPX.
- Use [appropriate personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) when caring for a person with MPX.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Wash and disinfect all fabrics, objects, and surfaces used by a person with MPX. CDC provides additional [guidelines for isolation and infection control](#) on its website.
- Anyone in close personal contact with a person with MPX can get it and should take steps to protect themselves.

## Vaccination

### Who should get vaccinated against MPX?

Vaccination is recommended for those who are most likely to be exposed to MPX.

This includes:

- People identified by public health officials as a contact of someone with MPX
- People at high risk for contact with MPX virus or patients with MPX, such as those who work in a laboratory or certain healthcare settings
- People who are aware that one of their sexual partners from the past two weeks has been diagnosed with MPX
- People who have had multiple sexual partners in the past two weeks
- People with multiple or unknown sexual partners, with priority being given to immunocompromised individuals and members of impacted communities (see [Basics: Who is at risk of getting MPX?](#))

Vaccination is currently not recommended for the general public for the prevention of MPX.

## **Where is the vaccine being offered in Maryland?**

Currently, in Maryland, the JYNNEOS vaccine is being offered to those who have been exposed to MPX (post-exposure prophylaxis/PEP) or with an increased chance of exposure to MPX (pre-exposure prophylaxis/PrEP). Those who want to be notified of available vaccine appointments at their local health departments, may pre-register for vaccine at [Maryland's MPX Vaccine Sign-Up](#). If eligible, you will be contacted to schedule an appointment.

## **Sexual Health**

### **Can wearing a condom during sex reduce MPX risk?**

While it is not fully known whether wearing a condom during sex can reduce the risk of MPX, condoms may protect your anus, mouth, penis, or vagina from exposure to MPX by providing a barrier against skin-to-skin contact with any rash the condom is covering. However, condoms alone may not prevent all exposures to MPX since the rash can occur on other parts of the body. Wearing a condom can also protect you from a range of STIs. If you have had sexual contact in the past 14 days and are experiencing any new symptoms, you should seek STI screening from your healthcare provider or a [local health department near you](#).

## **Pets and Animals**

### **Can MPX make my pet sick?**

MPX can spread between people and animals. However, the current risk to pets is believed to be low. People with MPX should avoid interacting with animals and find someone to care for their pets while they recover. You can find information about pets and MPX on [the CDC website](#).

## **Additional Information**

### **Where can I find more information about MPX in Maryland?**

For more information and resources, [visit the Maryland Department of Health MPX response page](#).

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## **Sources**

- Maryland Department of Health Website: [health.maryland.gov/monkeypox](https://health.maryland.gov/monkeypox)
- Centers for Disease Control Monkeypox Website: [cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox](https://cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox)

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