

# Monkey pox

## What is Monkey pox?

Monkey pox is a rare viral disease that occurs mainly in the rain forest countries of central and West Africa. The disease was first discovered in laboratory monkeys in 1958. Blood tests of animals in Africa later found evidence of monkey pox infection in a number of African rodents. The virus that causes monkey pox was recovered from an African squirrel. Laboratory studies showed that the virus also could infect mice, rats, and rabbits. In 1970, monkey pox was reported in humans for the first time. In June 2003, monkey pox was reported in prairie dogs and humans in the United States.

## What is the cause of monkey pox?

Monkey pox is caused by *Monkey pox virus*, which belongs to the orthopoxvirus group of viruses. Other orthopoxviruses that cause infections in humans include variola (smallpox), vaccinia (used for smallpox vaccine), and cowpox viruses.

## What are the clinical features of monkey pox?

In humans, monkey pox is similar to smallpox, although it is often milder. Unlike smallpox, monkey pox causes lymph nodes to swell (lymphadenopathy). The incubation period for monkey pox is about 12 days (range 7 to 17 days). The illness begins with fever, headache, muscle aches, backache, swollen lymph nodes, a general feeling of discomfort, and exhaustion. Within 1 to 3 days (sometimes longer) after the appearance of fever, the patient develops a papular rash (i.e., raised bumps), often first on the face but sometimes initially on other parts of the body. The lesions usually develop through several stages before crusting and falling off.

## How long does monkey pox last?

The illness typically lasts for 2 to 4 weeks.

### **Is monkey pox fatal?**

Studies of human monkey pox in rural Central and West Africa – where people live in remote areas and are medically underserved – have reported case-fatality ratios of 1% to 10%.

### **How do people get monkey pox?**

Monkey pox can spread to humans from an infected animal through an animal bite or direct contact with the animal's lesions or body fluids. The disease also can be spread from person to person, although it is much less infectious than smallpox. The virus is thought to be transmitted by respiratory droplets during direct and prolonged face-to-face contact. In addition, it is possible monkey pox can be spread by direct contact with body fluids of an infected person or with virus-contaminated objects, such as bedding or clothing.

### **Is there a treatment or vaccine for monkey pox?**

Currently, there is no proven, safe treatment for monkey pox. Smallpox vaccine has been reported to reduce the risk of monkey pox among previously vaccinated persons in Africa. CDC is recommending that persons investigating monkey pox outbreaks and involved in caring for infected individuals or animals should receive a smallpox vaccination to protect against monkey pox. Persons who have had close or intimate contact with individuals or animals confirmed to have monkey pox should also be vaccinated.

These persons can be vaccinated up to 14 days after exposure. CDC is not recommending preexposure vaccination for unexposed veterinarians, veterinary staff, or animal control officers, unless such persons are involved in field investigations.

### **What should people do if they think they have been exposed to an animal or person with?**

## **monkey pox?**

Persons who think they may have been exposed to a person or an animal (e.g., pet prairie dog) with monkey pox should contact their health care provider and their state or local health department.

## **Could I have monkey pox?**

It appears that most people who are ill with monkey pox in the United States got sick after close contact with infected prairie dogs that had been purchased as pets. Some patients may have been infected through contact with other infected animals. If you have not had close contact with a wild or exotic animal, then the risk that you might have monkey pox is very low.

## **What kinds of animals can get monkey pox?**

There is not enough information to determine all the types of animals that may become ill with monkey pox. Until more is known about this disease, it should be assumed that any mammal – including common household pets (e.g., dogs, cats) and “pocket pets” (e.g., hamsters or gerbils) – could get monkey pox if exposed to another animal that is infected.

## **What are the signs of monkey pox in animals?**

In the current U.S. outbreak, illness in animals has been reported to include fever, cough, discharge from the eyes, and enlarged lymph nodes, followed by a bumpy or blister-like rash. Pets that have monkey pox also may appear to be very tired and may not be eating or drinking. It is possible that some animals may have only minimal signs of illness. Some animals have died and others have recovered.

## **Can my pet get the smallpox vaccine to protect it from monkey pox?**

No, smallpox vaccination is not recommended for pets.

## **What should I do if I think my pet might have monkey pox?**

If your pet could have been exposed to a sick animal and is showing the symptoms of monkey pox, follow these instructions:

- Separate the animal from people and other animals immediately. Lock it in a room or put it in a cage or cardboard box well apart from others, such as in the garage.
- Wash your hands well with soap and hot water after contact with the animal and any object that may be contaminated with virus.
- Clothing should be changed after feeding or caring for the animal. Laundry (e.g., towels, clothing) may be washed in a standard washing machine with hot water and detergent. The use of chlorine bleach during hot water washing can provide an added measure of safety. Care should be used when handling soiled laundry to avoid direct contact with contaminated material. Soiled laundry should not be shaken or moved around a lot. Infectious particles could be spread and breathed in.
- Inform your state or local health department that you think you have a pet with monkey pox. The health department may pick up the animal, or they may tell you to take the animal to a vet.
- Do **not** release your pet into the wild. If it is infected, this could spread the disease to other animals and people.
- Do **not** leave your pet at a shelter. Again, this could spread the disease.
- Do **not** take your pet to a vet without calling first. The vet must take precautions to receive your pet.

### **If my pet has monkey pox, what will happen to it?**

If your vet determines that your pet has monkey pox, he or she will probably recommend that the animal be humanely euthanized to prevent further spread of this disease. This decision may be difficult for you, but it is the best step for the safety of family, friends and community. If monkey pox were to establish itself in the United States, many animals and people could become ill.