

## **OHA supports CBOs in state's response to hMPXV outbreak**

Many community organizations have likely heard from community members about hMPXV (human monkeypox virus) in light of an increase in cases announced during an Oregon Health Authority media briefing on July 7.

During the media briefing, Dr. Tim Menza, senior health advisor for OHA's hMPXV response, announced new cases of the virus in Oregon and discussed who is most at risk for hMPXV, steps people can take to protect themselves, and ways the agency, local public health authorities, tribes and community organizations are working together to help people who are or may be affected by the outbreak.

As of July 13, Oregon has a total of 11 presumptive and confirmed hMPXV cases.

Throughout its preparation for hMPXV's arrival in Oregon and investigation of new cases, OHA has remained concerned about stigma that people most affected by hMPXV during this outbreak – gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men – may experience.

First, the agency has sought to clarify that the term monkeypox is a misnomer, as the natural hosts for the virus are rodents, not non-human primates. As a result, OHA, in alignment with the World Health Organization and other respected health agencies and organizations around the world, is using the acronym *hMPXV* when referring to the virus.

Second, in its messaging, OHA has emphasized that while the current global outbreak of hMPXV happens to largely affect members of this community, anyone can be infected with the virus, since it is transmitted during direct, close, personal skin-to-skin contact with a person with symptoms. This can occur during activities such as sex, cuddling, massage, kissing, talking closely, and/or caring for someone with hMPXV, but further studies are needed to determine if the virus is a sexually transmitted disease.

At the same time, in recognizing the disproportionate impact the virus has had on men who have sex with men, OHA has conducted outreach to community organizations that support the larger LGBTQIA+ and queer community to

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empower individuals with information, testing, prevention and treatment strategies so they can protect themselves from hMPXV.

The agency has acknowledged the deep trauma that the hMPXV outbreak has triggered within the LGBTQ+/queer community from having lived through two pandemics – HIV and COVID-19 – only to face a potential third. It has encouraged community members to be staunch self-advocates for their health by having open communication with sex partners and talking with their health care providers – and if that if they don't have a health care provider, to contact their local public health authority to get help finding one.

OHA will continue to provide regular updates to local public health authorities, tribes and community organizations on the response to the hMPXV outbreak in Oregon and around the world, and how people at risk for hMPXV can stay healthy.

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