
May 26, 2022

Dear LGBTQ+ Community,

We know that folks have questions about monkeypox infection, and concern about stigma, as a majority of cases at the present moment in this current outbreak have been identified as men who have sex with men. We are well aware of the history of the harm of HIV stigma, as well as the trauma/fatigue of the long COVID pandemic. We'd like to share some information, some reassurance, and a recommendation.

Though it is alarming to hear of another virus spreading, monkeypox is not like COVID. It is a known virus that has caused small outbreaks over the last few decades. It is less easy to transmit than COVID, transmitted differently, and people are only infectious when they have symptoms that they can feel.

More about monkeypox:

Monkeypox is a rash illness caused by a virus (orthopoxvirus) related to, but different from, smallpox. Most individuals recover in 2-4 weeks without treatment. The spots from the rash can leave skin scars.

For the current international outbreak, monkeypox virus has most often been spread from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact with the rash/sores of an infected person. Less commonly it can spread through respiratory droplets from the mouth or airway like the flu, but because these droplets are larger and don't travel far in the air, prolonged face to face contact is necessary. In parts of the world where monkeypox infections are more common, respiratory spread plays a larger role in transmission. Monkeypox is not a sexually transmitted disease, but it can spread through intimate contact during sex when someone has an active rash. It can also spread to household members and care providers through caretaking activities that may involve contact with bodily fluids, fluid from the pox, or contaminated bedding or clothing.

Anyone can get monkeypox through close contact with someone who is infected. It is not limited to one community or another. There is nothing specific about men who have sex with men that puts someone at higher risk for getting the virus. In this particular outbreak this happens to be the first socially-connected group that has been affected.

Public health recommendations:

Public Health is NOT asking you to avoid PRIDE, community events, or contact with others, including intimate contact. We do not think that any events, venues, or businesses, such as bathhouses, need to close. We are unlikely to change that recommendation, even if or when we start to see cases locally.

Here is our main recommendation right now: we want you to pay close attention to any new rashes, which may be preceded by fever/chills/achy body/fatigue. If you get symptoms, especially if you have traveled to other areas in the world in the last month where cases have been found, or you know you have been in contact with anyone with the infection, please isolate yourself at home until you can connect with a health care provider to decide if you need testing.

What to do if you think you have monkeypox:

Although the rash can be anywhere on the body, including face, hands, or feet, some of the recent cases internationally have begun with rash in the genital and/or anal area. This can mimic syphilis, herpes, or shingles. If you have symptoms that concern you, please call the provider you see for sexual health issues. If you don't have a provider, please call the _____. The clinic sees clients regardless of insurance or ability to pay, and will be prepared to help evaluate.

Public health has been communicating to providers what they'll need to know and do if their patients have symptoms.

Who is at high risk of serious disease from monkeypox:

Children, pregnant people and people who are immune compromised are at greater risk of severe disease from monkeypox. This includes people living with HIV whose disease is not fully treated, but should not be of extra concern to individuals with suppressed viral load. At this time, limited vaccine may be available for specific high-risk cases/exposures. Antiviral treatments exist if they are needed.

How to get more information:

Public Health is paying close attention to this disease, and will continue to share information with the community as we have it. The Public Health Communicable Disease team is culturally competent working with LGBTQ+ community members around sexual health and other health issues, and is prepared to work with anyone who gets monkeypox to help them and their contacts.

Please help share this information with other community members. Information may change rapidly. Please go to the CDC, Oregon Health Authority, or _____ County website for more up-to-date information.

In community,
