

# Mpox (MONKEYPOX VIRUS) AND SAFE SEX PRACTICES



Mpox—sometimes called monkeypox—is a rare illness caused by a virus in the same family as the smallpox virus. It can appear as a rash, pimples, or blisters that may be painful or itchy. Despite the similarities, Mpox is not related to chickenpox.

For some individuals, the pain from the rash has been described as severe. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid exposure and unprotected sex with people infected with Mpox.

Anyone can become infected with Mpox, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or age. Currently, there are safe and effective vaccines to prevent the onset of Mpox in those who have been or are likely to be exposed. If you believe you have been exposed talk to your provider about receiving the vaccine.<sup>1</sup>

It is also important to take steps to protect yourself and others from becoming infected.

## What are the symptoms?

Mpox typically presents as a rash that can be located on the hands, feet, chest, face, mouth, or even on or near a person's genitals or anus. The rash can look like pimples or blisters, may be painful or itchy, and will go through several stages of appearance before healing—including scabs.<sup>2</sup>

Other symptoms can include...

- Fever
- Chills
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Exhaustion
- Muscle aches and backache
- Headache
- Respiratory symptoms
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
  - Cough

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You may experience all or only a few symptoms. Others only experience the rash with no other symptoms.

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Symptoms usually start within three weeks of exposure to the virus. People who have the flu-like symptoms will usually develop the rash 1–4 days later.

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Mpox can spread from the time symptoms start until the rash has healed, all scabs have fallen off, and a fresh layer of skin has formed. The illness typically lasts 14–28 days.<sup>2</sup>

## How can I lower my risk of Mpox during sex?

Talk to your sexual partner(s) about any recent illness and look out for new or unexplained rashes on your body or your partner's body—including the genitals and anus. If you or your partner have recently been sick, currently feel sick, or have a new/unexplained rash, refrain from physical contact or sex and see a healthcare provider.

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If you or a partner has Mpox, the best way to protect yourself and others is to avoid sex of any kind (oral, anal, vaginal) and to not kiss or touch each other while sick. Especially avoid contact with any rash.

## Do not share things like towels, toothbrushes, fetish gear, and sex toys.

If you or your partner have or think you might have Mpox, and you decide to have sex, consider the following to reduce the chance of spreading the virus:

- Have virtual sex with no in-person contact.
- Masturbate together at a distance, without touching each other and without sharing items like sex toys.
- Consider having sex with your clothes on or covering areas where rash is present, reducing as much skin-to-skin contact as possible. If the rash is confined to the genital or anal areas, condoms may help, but are unlikely to prevent spread of Mpox on their own.<sup>3</sup>

## Remember to wash your hands, fetish gear, sex toys, and any fabrics (bedding, towels, clothing) after having sex.

Learn more about infection control at [medlineplus.gov/infectioncontrol.html](https://medlineplus.gov/infectioncontrol.html)

You can lower the chance of getting Mpox at places like raves, parties, clubs, and festivals by *adhering to the following*:

- Stay home if you feel sick or have a rash
- Avoid gatherings where you are more likely to share skin-to-skin contact with others
- Minimize skin-to-skin contact by covering exposed skin and practicing physical distancing
- Avoid enclosed spaces where intimate or anonymous sexual contact with multiple partners occurs. These can include...
  - Back rooms
  - Saunas
  - Sex clubs
  - Private or public sex parties<sup>3</sup>

## What should I do if I think I have Mpox?

Stay home if you are experiencing symptoms except to get medical care.<sup>2</sup>

- Avoid close contact—including sex or being intimate with anyone—until you have been checked out by a healthcare provider.
- If you don't have a provider or health insurance, visit a public health clinic near you.
- Call ahead before visiting your healthcare provider.
- When you see a healthcare provider, wear a mask, and discuss why you think you may have Mpox.
- Stay in touch with your healthcare provider. Follow their advice on getting tested for the virus.
- If you are concerned you have symptoms of Mpox or if you have questions regarding this disease, contact your local or state health department.<sup>2</sup>

### More resources

We offer many resources for tribes and urban Indian serving organizations as well as healthcare providers and community members to help ensure that information is shared to keep our relatives safe and healthy.

[www.uihi.org/resources/](https://www.uihi.org/resources/)

### References

1. About Mpox. *CDC*. Updated July 22, 2022. Accessed August 5, 2022. [www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/about.html](https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/about.html)
2. Signs and symptoms. *CDC*. Updated August 5, 2022. Accessed August 8, 2022. [www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/symptoms.html](https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/symptoms.html)
3. Safer sex, social gatherings, and MPV. *CDC*. Updated August 5, 2022. Accessed August 5, 2022. [www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/sexualhealth/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/sexualhealth/index.html)