

# **What You Need to Know About Monkeypox**

## **Monkeypox Virus**

Monkeypox is a rare disease caused by infection with the monkeypox virus. Monkeypox virus is part of the same family of viruses as variola virus, the virus that causes smallpox. Monkeypox symptoms are similar to smallpox symptoms, but milder, and monkeypox is rarely fatal. Monkeypox is not related to chickenpox.

Monkeypox was discovered in 1958 when two outbreaks of a pox-like disease occurred in colonies of monkeys kept for research. Despite being named “monkeypox,” the source of the disease remains unknown. However, African rodents and non-human primates (like monkeys) might harbor the virus and infect people.

The first human case of monkeypox was recorded in 1970. Prior to the 2022 outbreak, monkeypox had been reported in people in several central and western African countries. Previously, almost all monkeypox cases in people outside of Africa were linked to international travel to countries where the disease commonly occurs or through imported animals. These cases occurred on multiple continents.

## **Monkeypox Symptoms**

People with monkeypox get a rash that may be located on or near the genitals (penis, testicles, labia, and vagina) or anus (butthole) and could be on other areas like the hands, feet, chest, face, or mouth.

- The rash will go through several stages, including scabs, before healing.
- The rash can initially look like pimples or blisters and may be painful or itchy.

Other symptoms of monkeypox can include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Exhaustion
- Muscle aches and backache

- Headache
- Respiratory symptoms (e.g. sore throat, nasal congestion, or cough)

You may experience all or only a few symptoms

- Sometimes, people have flu-like symptoms before the rash.
- Some people get a rash first, followed by other symptoms.
- Others only experience a rash.

### **How long do monkeypox symptoms last?**

Monkeypox symptoms usually start within 3 weeks of exposure to the virus. If someone has flu-like symptoms, they will usually develop a rash 1-4 days later.

Monkeypox can be 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 2-4 weeks.

### **How it Spreads**

Monkeypox spreads in a few ways.

- Monkeypox can spread to anyone through close, personal, often skin-to-skin contact, including:
  - Direct contact with monkeypox rash, scabs, or body fluids from a person with monkeypox.
  - Touching objects, fabrics (clothing, bedding, or towels), and surfaces that have been used by someone with monkeypox.
  - Contact with respiratory secretions.
- This direct contact can happen during intimate contact, including:
  - Oral, anal, and vaginal sex or touching the genitals (penis, testicles, labia, and vagina) or anus (butthole) of a person with monkeypox.
  - Hugging, massage, and kissing.
  - Prolonged face-to-face contact.
  - Touching fabrics and objects during sex that were used by a person with monkeypox and that have not been disinfected, such as bedding, towels, fetish gear, and sex toys.
- A pregnant person can spread the virus to their fetus through the placenta.

It's also possible for people to get monkeypox from infected animals, either by being scratched or bitten by the animal or by preparing or eating meat or using products from an infected animal.

A person with monkeypox can spread it to others 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.

Scientists are still researching:

- If the virus can be spread when someone has no [symptoms](#)
- How often monkeypox is spread through respiratory secretions, or when a person with monkeypox symptoms might be more likely to spread the virus through respiratory secretions.
- Whether monkeypox can be spread through semen, vaginal fluids, urine, or feces.

### **For More Information**

- [Prevention](#)
- [If You Are Sick](#)
- [Treatment](#)
- [2022 U.S. Monkeypox Outbreak](#)

► For Monkeypox information from the **Virginia Department of Health (VDH)** go to: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/surveillance-and-investigation/monkeypox/>

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