



Navigating monkeypox: considerations for gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men

10 June 2022

What is the situation with monkeypox?

There have been monkeypox cases identified in several countries throughout and beyond Europe. Although anyone can become infected with monkeypox, most cases are currently being detected in gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men. Information about this outbreak of monkeypox is still emerging and we are continuously learning more. Stay up-to-date and stick to reliable sources of information (see section 'Stay calm and stay informed' below).

How is monkeypox passed on?

Monkeypox can be transmitted through close physical contact (skin-to-skin), including during sex. It can also spread through respiratory droplets in prolonged face-to-face contact, and through contaminated objects (such as clothing, bedding and sex toys).

Common symptoms of monkeypox and what to do if you develop symptoms

Monkeypox can take the form of rashes, spots, ulcers or blisters anywhere on the body, but often in the genital area. It may also cause swollen and painful lymph glands, fever, headache and muscle aches; chills or exhaustion. Most of those affected by the current outbreak will probably just need a few weeks of recovery at home, but a few people have been hospitalised due to their monkeypox symptoms or subsequent skin infections.

If you have any of the above symptoms:

- seek medical advice by contacting your local health provider or sexual health clinic;
- take a break from visiting gatherings, venues or events and avoid having close contact, including sex, until you have sought the advice of a health provider and know that you are well.

Gay sex stigma and monkeypox

Monkeypox is not a 'gay disease' and gay men are not to be blamed or shamed for the outbreak. Stigma is counterproductive. Monkeypox is nothing to be ashamed of and is not associated with a specific sexual orientation. Do not let stigma prevent you from accessing the healthcare you need. You can help by combatting stigma, sharing information, paying attention to symptoms, and if diagnosed, by following the recommendations of your healthcare provider (e.g. by self-isolating and helping health authorities to notify close contacts).

What are public health services doing?

Public health services are monitoring and investigating the outbreak and taking measures to slow or stop the spread of monkeypox. Public health professionals will also undertake contact tracing in a respectful manner in order to ensure confidentiality. If possible, keep contact details of sexual partners as this may help with tracing and partner notification if you are diagnosed with monkeypox.

Testing for monkeypox

- The symptoms of monkeypox can be similar to those for other infections (e.g. chickenpox). To confirm a monkeypox infection, individuals need to be assessed by a health professional and tested for the virus.
- If you have been tested for monkeypox, take a break from visiting gatherings, venues and events and avoid having close contact, including sex, until you receive your test results. If your test result is positive, follow the advice of your healthcare provider and your local public health authorities.

Simple self-care advice, if you test positive for monkeypox

- If you are diagnosed with monkeypox, you can reduce the risk of passing the virus on by avoiding close contact with others, including sex. Where possible, self-isolate in a room, and follow the advice given to you by your healthcare provider and local health authorities.
- Discuss with your healthcare provider how to notify people that you had close contact with before being diagnosed.
- In terms of treatment, follow the advice of your healthcare provider (no specific treatment is usually needed). Take care of your skin, keeping areas with the rash as clean as possible. Wash with a mild soap and if the rash itches ask for medication. Remember to wash your hands properly after touching the rash. This will help to reduce infection and complications. If you see swelling or redness around the rash, or if you suddenly develop a fever - even though your symptoms were improving - seek medical advice.
- Seek mental health support if you think that you might need it.

Socialising during the summer season

To date, most of the cases in Europe have been fairly mild, and only very few have required hospitalisation. Participating in outdoor events and festivals does not put you at greater risk of contracting monkeypox infection, but close physical contact, including sex, does increase your risk of exposure. Be aware of common symptoms and seek care early if you or a recent partner have any of the symptoms mentioned above. If you experience symptoms, take a break from participating in events until you have been checked by a healthcare professional.

Stay calm and stay informed

PrEPster and The Love Tank provide regular updates on monkeypox.

- Everything we know about monkeypox so far - www.queerhealth.info/monkeypox

ECDC provides regular updates on monkeypox.

- Monkeypox multi-country outbreak – www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/monkeypox-outbreak
- Questions and answers on monkeypox - www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/monkeypox/questions-and-answers.

The World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe also provides regular updates on monkeypox.

- Monkeypox in the European Region - www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/communicable-diseases/monkeypox-virus
- Monkeypox, Questions & Answers- <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/monkeypox>

This information has been produced by community organisations and public health experts. We would like to thank experts from the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe who also provided input. Although this information addresses the group that has been most affected by the current outbreak to date - gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men - it applies to anyone who may be exposed monkeypox infection.

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