



About mpox (monkeypox)

Mpox is a disease caused by the mpox virus. It is part of the same family of viruses as variola virus which causes smallpox. Mpox symptoms are similar to smallpox symptoms, but milder and rarely fatal. Most people will recover in 2-4 weeks.

More severe cases, while rare, can occur- requiring additional medical support.

It is a viral zoonotic disease that occurs primarily in tropical rainforest areas of Central and West Africa and is occasionally exported to other regions. Zoonotic means it can spread between animals and humans.

Since May 2022, there has been a global increase in mpox infections in multiple countries where the illness had not previously been seen.

The situation is evolving quickly and health authorities are monitoring closely so the most up to date evidence and advice can be provided.

Most, but not all, cases recorded in Australia have been acquired overseas.

Symptoms of mpox

Mpox symptoms may begin with rash and sores, swollen lymph nodes, fever, headache, muscle aches, backache, chills and exhaustion. Some people only experience the rash and sores.

While the rash often starts on the face, including in the mouth, and spreads to other parts of the body including the hands, feet, and chest, in this outbreak it is being seen especially on the genital and perianal regions of affected people.

The rash can vary from person to person and take on the appearance of pimples, blisters or sores, which can then burst to form sores or ulcers or a scab. These can vary in size and number.

A person is generally infectious until all scabs have healed and a fresh layer of skin has formed. This may take several weeks, and the sores can be painful especially if they join or appear in the mouth or rectum.

Symptoms usually begin 7-14 days after exposure. But the amount of time it takes for symptoms to show (the incubation period) can be as short as 5 days or as long as 21 days.

How mpox spreads

Mpox spreads from one person to another by direct contact with infected bodily fluids, such as contact with the sores, or scabs on the skin, or through touching contaminated objects that the infected person has used, such as linen or clothes. It may also be transmitted during close physical contact, including sex.

It can also be spread through prolonged face to face contact by inhaling infected respiratory droplets (for example coughing or sneezing close to another person's face for a length of time).

It can be passed to the foetus via the placenta during pregnancy.

People at risk of mpox

Anyone who has been in close contact with someone with mpox, either within Australia or overseas, is at risk. People could be exposed if they were in close, prolonged contact with a person with the disease.

If symptoms appear, contact your GP or local healthcare provider so you can receive appropriate care and advice and minimise the risk to others.

How to prevent mpox

There are number of measures people can take to help prevent infection:

- People who have mpox should isolate from others until the sores are fully cleared.
- Household members should avoid physical contact with the infected person, including with any materials, such as linen or towels, that have been in contact with an infected person.
- Careful hand and respiratory hygiene are recommended for the infected person and everyone in the household - including washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- If isolation is unavoidable, an infected person should wear a face mask and cover any lesions when in the same room as other people, including when receiving medical care.

For more information on the public health management of people with monkeypox, and on infection prevention and control for health workers, visit health.gov.au/monkeypox-mpox.

Mpox diagnosis

Infection can be confirmed by testing a swab collected from the base of a blister from the skin rash. Advice on specimen collection and handling can be found at health.gov.au/monkeypox-mpox.

Mpox treatment

Mpox illness typically lasts for 2–4 weeks and is mild. Some patients may need simple pain medicines and oral fluids, with a health care professional monitoring their symptoms. Some patients may need additional care such as intravenous fluids and medicine to control fever or pain.

There are some medications available that may assist in treatment of people with severe illness. Australia has a vaccine and a treatment available and other options are being considered by states and territories. While rare, severe cases may need intensive care. More treatment information can be found at health.gov.au/monkeypox-mpox.

Public health response

Healthcare professionals in the community, hospitals and pathology practices, have been alerted to the cases of mpox in Australia. They must notify any suspected cases to the local public health unit immediately. Public health unit staff will then start an investigation, contact tracing and control measures.