

What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is 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.

What treatments are available for monkeypox?

There are currently no treatments specifically for monkeypox. However, monkeypox and smallpox viruses are genetically similar, which means that antiviral drugs developed to treat smallpox, such as tecovirimat (TPOXX), may be used to treat monkeypox. This treatment may be recommended for people who are more likely to get severely ill, like patients with weakened immune systems, or people with complications from the infection or symptoms not controlled with supportive care.

I tested positive to monkeypox, what should I do?

People who tested positive for monkeypox should self-isolate at home away from others. If possible, you should have your own separate bedroom and bathroom. You should not go to work, school or other public areas. You should avoid contact with others including family, friends, or others without an essential need to be in the home. Do not engage in sexual activity that involves direct physical contact with others. Do not share potentially contaminated items, such as bed linens, towels, clothing, drinking glasses or eating utensils. You should also routinely clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces in your home. If possible, cover any skin rashes or lesions to the extent possible by wearing long pants or long sleeves or with band aids or gauze.

Individuals who test positive for monkeypox should avoid using contact lenses to prevent inadvertent infection and potentially serious infection of the eye.

Although human to animal spread is rare, you should also avoid contact with any pets in your home as there is a risk of transmitting monkeypox to your pet and certain animals are a known reservoir for monkeypox. If possible, friends or family should care for healthy animals until you have fully recovered. If your pet develops an illness, contact your veterinarian immediately and inform her or him of your pet's exposure to monkeypox.

If your symptoms worsen to a point where you need to seek medical care, please call ahead so that your healthcare providers can plan and take proper precautions prior to your arrival. When visiting a facility, you should wear a well-fitting mask and cover any lesions to the best extent possible.

When was I exposed to monkeypox?

The incubation period (time from exposure to illness) for monkeypox is typically 7-14 days but can be up to 21 days prior to the onset of the prodrome or early symptoms of monkeypox. These symptoms may include fever, headache, swollen lymph nodes or a general feeling of being unwell (malaise). It is important that when speaking to the health department that you work to identify any partners during this period as they may potentially be infectious with monkeypox.

Who should I notify about my diagnosis?

Persons positive for monkeypox are considered contagious from the onset of symptoms and until the symptoms resolve or when the last scab falls off and a fresh layer of skin has formed. Your health department will work to notify any intimate partners that you had during this time in which you were contagious and offer them post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) in an effort to prevent infection. It is very important that you work with the health department so that we can confidentiality notify these partners and offer them PEP. We will also work with you to notify any partners that you had in the 21 days prior to onset of symptoms so that we can offer them testing and/or treatment referrals if indicated. The health department will also work with you to identify any other persons that you might have exposed or had casual contact with including roommates, family, friends, healthcare provider etc. We will work with you to identify the risk of exposure and offer PEP to them as indicated.

When can I leave isolation?

You can end self-isolation when the rash has fully resolved, the scabs have fallen off, and a fresh layer of intact skin has formed. This means you are no longer contagious to others. The North Dakota Department of Health and/or your medical provider will work with you on helping you to determine if you have met the conditions to leave isolation.

When can I resume sexual activity?

While you are self-isolating, you are advised to refrain from sexual activity to reduce the risk of you passing the infection on to your partner.

It is not known how long monkeypox virus remains present in semen and other genital excretions. If you wish to resume sexual activity after your self-isolation has ended, you should use a condom for up to 8 weeks after your rash has scabbed over and scabs have fallen off. This is a precaution to reduce the risk of spreading infection to your partner.