



UK Health Security Agency

Monkeypox: Information sheet

Introduction

Monkeypox is a rare disease that is caused by infection with monkeypox virus.

Monkeypox was first discovered in 1958 when two outbreaks of a pox-like disease occurred in colonies of monkeys kept for research. The first human case of monkeypox was recorded in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and since then has been reported in other central and western African countries. Most cases are reported from DRC and Nigeria.

Catching monkeypox

Monkeypox does not spread easily between people.

Spread of monkeypox may occur when a person comes into close contact with an animal (rodents are believed to be the primary animal reservoir for transmission to humans), human, or materials contaminated with the virus. The virus enters the body through broken skin (even if not visible), the respiratory tract, or the mucous membranes (eyes, nose, or mouth).

Person-to-person spread is very uncommon, but may occur through:

- contact with clothing or linens (such as bedding or towels) used by an infected person
- direct contact with monkeypox skin lesions or scabs
- coughing or sneezing of an individual with a monkeypox rash

Incubation period

The incubation period is the duration/time between contact with the infected person and the time that the first symptoms appear. The incubation period for monkeypox is between 5 and 21 days.

Symptoms

Monkeypox infection is usually a self-limiting illness and most people recover within several weeks. However, severe illness can occur in some individuals.

The illness begins with:

- fever
- headache
- muscle aches
- backache
- swollen lymph nodes
- chills
- exhaustion

Within 1 to 5 days after the appearance of fever, a rash develops, often beginning on the face then spreading to other parts of the body. The rash changes and goes through different stages before finally forming a scab which later falls off.

Diagnosing monkeypox

Clinical diagnosis of monkeypox can be difficult, and it is often confused with other infections such as chickenpox. A definite diagnosis of monkeypox requires assessment by a health professional and specific testing in a specialist laboratory.

Treatment

Treatment for monkeypox is mainly supportive. The illness is usually mild and most of those infected will recover within a few weeks without treatment.

Further information

Additional information on Monkeypox can be found on

UKHSA webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/monkeypox>

WHO factsheet: <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/monkeypox>