



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

**Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control Division
1010 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, MA 02118
Phone: 617-534-5611 Fax: 617-534-5905**

Monkeypox

What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is a rare disease caused by a virus. It was called “monkeypox” because it was first isolated in laboratory monkeys. The virus can be found in a variety of types of animals, primarily in Central and Western Africa. Monkeypox belongs to the same group of viruses as smallpox and the virus used in the smallpox vaccine (vaccinia). In 1970, monkeypox was reported in humans for the first time.

Is an outbreak of monkeypox currently occurring in the United States?

In June 2003, cases of monkeypox were reported in residents in the Wisconsin, northern Illinois, and northwestern Indiana. Most people became ill after direct or close contact with recently purchased sick prairie dogs. These are the first reported cases of monkeypox acquired in the United States.

How is monkeypox spread?

Monkeypox can spread to people from an infected animal through an animal bite or direct contact with the animal’s broken skin, its rash, blood or body fluids. It is also possible monkeypox can be spread by direct contact with body fluids of an infected person or by contact with virus-contaminated objects, such as bedding and clothing. Rarely, respiratory droplets may transmit the virus person-to-person during prolonged face-to-face contact. Monkeypox is much less infectious than smallpox.

What are the symptoms of monkeypox?

In humans, the signs and symptoms are similar to smallpox, but are usually much milder. Typically, 12 days after exposure the illness begins with fever, headache, muscle aches, backache, swollen lymph nodes, a general feeling of discomfort, and exhaustion. Within 1 to 3 days (sometimes longer) after the appearance of fever, the person develops a rash that looks like raised bumps. They often first appear on the face but sometimes on other parts of the body. After going through several stages, the bumps get crusty, scab over and fall off. The illness typically lasts for 2 to 4 weeks. In Africa, death occurred in 1-10% of people with monkeypox.

Is there treatment for monkeypox?

Currently there is no specific treatment available for monkeypox. Smallpox vaccine given prior to exposure is thought to help. Limited information suggests that smallpox vaccine given within a few days of exposure to monkeypox may prevent or lessen the severity of monkeypox. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is recommending that certain groups of people be vaccinated against monkeypox. These groups include: 1) people investigating suspected human and animal monkeypox cases, 2) health care workers (including veterinary workers) who care for suspected cases of monkeypox, 3) close contacts of human cases of monkeypox and 4) persons with close contacts with ill prairie dogs acquired after April 15 in the geographic areas affected by the outbreak. People in these groups can be vaccinated up to 14 days after exposure.

What is being done to prevent the spread of this disease?

The federal Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has issued an immediate ban on the importation of all rodents from Africa. This notice also prohibits the sale and transportation of these rodents within the United States. DHHS also implemented a ban on the sale or movement of prairie dogs between states and within state boundaries.

Over

How can you prevent monkeypox?

It appears most people became ill after having close contact with infected prairie dogs that had been purchased as pets. People should avoid contact with ill prairie dogs or Gambian giant rats. In addition, people should wash their hands with soap and water following direct contact with any animal.

What should you do if you think you have been exposed to animal or person with monkeypox?

People who think they may have been exposed to a person or an animal with monkeypox should contact their primary care provider and notify BPHC at 617-534-5611. Additional information on monkeypox can be found on the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/monkeypox/index.htm>

**For more information, please contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control
(617) 534-5611 or www.bphc.org**