

INFORMATION ON HOW MONKEY POX IS TRANSMITTED

Monkey pox is a viral disease, transmitted from animals (a range of mammals, which are the reservoir) to man (hunting/butchering/skin contact) in the first instance. Once it has infected humans, person to person, either directly or via infected materials (such as bed linen/towels) can take place. The virus origin is from Central Africa (Congo basin) and West Africa.

Transmission person to person can be airborne (e.g. inhaling large droplets [not aerosol like in influenza or COVID] from an infected individual) or having close contact with the skin of an infected individual when the rash has appeared or with materials (bed linen/towels/objects infected with fluids from the rash of patients).

The disease has 2 phases: a first one when patients has flu like symptoms (raised temperature, headache; muscle pain; backache; swollen glands) and a second phase (3-5 days later) when the rash appears (vesicles maturing into pustules and then scabs). It is the rash which contains large amount of virus, which can pass onto another person (when close, skin to skin contact) either through visible or less visible skin lesions or the mucosae membranes (eye, nose, mouth).

We are all susceptible to the disease if exposed to an infected person and have a close and prolonged contact with this person (the disease is actually not so easily transmissible by the way and is mostly self-limiting).

The emphasis on the gay community comes from the fact that several of the over 70 cases now identified in the UK, but also in those identified in Portugal and Spain, are amongst Men who have Sex with Men. This does not mean that this is a disease of MSM, but simply that is a disease spreading through very close contact, hence the relevance of sexual, intimate contact.

Prevention is through personal infection control measures: avoid close contacts with somebody with a rash suggestive of Monkey pox; wearing of a mask when near somebody with a high temperature; swollen glands; muscular pain (phase 1) or with a rash (phase 2).

Seek medical attention if any of above symptoms and either known contact with a case or travel from West/Central Africa in the last 21 days. Should anybody with above characteristics, the person should isolate them-selves and contact medical services to be appropriately and safely examined.

Please note that we do not have cases so far and we are making preparations within the health services to ensure that, should an infected individual arrive in the country, they might be promptly recognized and treated according to infection control protocols to minimize the risk of spread.

