

Briefing for Schools and Early Years Settings: Rise in monkeypox infections

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is investigating a number of cases of monkeypox in England. It is a rare virus in this country but is normally found in West or Central Africa. There are currently monkeypox cases in several countries worldwide, including Spain, Portugal, the USA and Singapore, as well as ongoing outbreaks in West and Central Africa. The aim of this briefing is to raise awareness, update you on the signs and symptoms, and confirm the actions that need to be taken.

Background Information

The risk of Monkeypox is **low** to the UK public but there are a number of cases in the UK and this is rising. Monkeypox is a viral infection usually associated with travel to West Africa. The virus is in the same family as the cowpox and smallpox viruses, and it is usually mild. It is a self-limited illness spread by very close contact with someone with monkeypox and most people will recover within a few weeks. Recent cases are predominately in gay, bi-sexual and other men who have sex with men. Monkeypox will not spread like COVID-19 because it is not aerosol spread. Transmission can occur via:

- close physical contact, kissing, skin-to-skin contact
- touching clothing, bedding or towels used by someone with the monkeypox rash
- touching monkeypox skin lesions or scabs, particularly if your own skin has sores or cuts
- the coughs or sneezes of a person with the monkeypox rash (droplet spread)

Monkeypox causes a rash similar to chickenpox and the time between being infected and developing infection is between 5 and 21 days.

In terms of the severity of the disease, it is worse than chickenpox and not as severe as smallpox. Most cases are of relatively mild disease, and none of the current UK cases have had severe disease to date.

Chickenpox and monkeypox are two different and unrelated diseases. Chickenpox is a mild and common illness that most children catch and there are a number of cases in the UK at the moment.

Signs and symptoms of monkeypox

Symptoms include:

- Recent unexpected/unusual spots, ulcers or blisters anywhere on the body
- Fever
- Headache
- Swollen glands
- Aching muscles
- Exhaustion
- Shivering (chills)

The **rash (unusual spots)** can be on any parts of the body including palms and soles of the feet, and on the genitals. This rash will form into a scab or blister which later falls off. The infection usually lasts 14-21 days and clears up on its own.

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Treatment for monkeypox is mainly supportive, but newer antivirals may be used. The illness is usually mild and most of those infected will recover within a few weeks without treatment. Medical and nursing supportive care will be provided to individuals to manage symptoms if required. Smallpox vaccine can be used when someone has been exposed to monkeypox and is 85% effective in reducing the risk of becoming infected. The UK has ensured that there are sufficient stocks of smallpox vaccine, should they be required.

Contact tracing is being performed for all of the cases. Isolation advice is given on a case-by-case basis depending on the specific exposure circumstances of that individual so will differ among different contacts.

Actions to be taken

With an increase in disease activity, it is important to: -

- be extra vigilant and mindful of the symptoms.
- understand the symptoms and how to seek help.
- clean your hands to prevent the spread of germs. You should wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap/water not available use a hand sanitiser with at least 60% alcohol.
- ensure your home or setting is cleaned regularly with a detergent and disinfectant cleaning product (or a combined product). Specialist cleaning advice will be provided should you have a case in your household or setting.

Current advice and guidance

- Contact sexual health services (by phone) if you have a rash with blisters and either:
 - you've been in close contact with someone who has or might have monkeypox (even if they've not been tested yet) in the past 3 weeks
 - you've been to West or Central Africa in the past 3 weeks
 - you're a man who has sex with men
- Stay at home and avoid close contact with other people until you've been told what to do (unless an emergency and you need to contact 999).
- Stay at home and call 111 for advice if you're not able to contact a sexual health clinic.
- NHS 111 can tell you what to do if you have a rash but:
 - you have not been in close contact with someone who has or might have monkeypox
 - you have not been to West or Central Africa recently

Further information on monkeypox and what to do, can be found [here](#).

Who to contact?

- **Contact your local sexual health service** - Sexual health clinics are a good option for people with symptoms because they have expertise in infectious diseases, are experienced with infection control, and are regularly accessed by many people.

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Coventry Sexual Health Service

Phone

0300 020 0027

Online

<https://www.ishs.org.uk/>

Warwickshire Sexual Health Service

Phone

0300 123 6644

Online

www.sexualhealthwarwickshire.nhs.uk

- Ring **NHS on 111** for advice and onward referral

Please be aware – do not go to a medical clinic without contacting them first. If you have symptoms stay at home and avoid close contact with other people until you have been told what to do.

Further sources of information

- NHS advice on what to do: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/monkeypox/>
- UKHSA rolling news story, including latest case numbers on.gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/monkeypox-cases-confirmed-in-england-latest-updates>
- UKHSA twitter thread: <https://twitter.com/UKHSA/status/1526255175828127746>
- Professor Kevin Fenton explaining what Monkeypox is and how to spot the signs video: https://twitter.com/UKHSA/status/1527236452555403265?s=20&t=uQuNKC_RoLYstP5V-8HLuw

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