

# Social Gatherings, Safer Sex and Monkeypox

Monkeypox is a disease caused by a virus not commonly seen in the United States. While we work to contain the current outbreak and study the virus, we want you to have information so you can make informed choices when you are in spaces or situations where monkeypox could be spread through close, intimate contact or during sex. There is a lot we still need to learn about monkeypox, and we will update this information as we learn more on [www.cdc.gov/monkeypox](http://www.cdc.gov/monkeypox).

## What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is a disease that can make you sick, including a rash, which may look like pimples or blisters, often with an earlier flu-like illness. Monkeypox can spread to anyone through close, personal, often skin-to-skin contact including:

- Direct contact with monkeypox rash, sores, or scabs from a person with monkeypox. We believe this is currently the most common way that monkeypox is spreading in the U.S.
- Contact with objects, fabrics (clothing, bedding, or towels), and surfaces that have been used by someone with monkeypox.
- Contact with respiratory secretions, through kissing and other face-to-face contact.

This contact can happen when you have sex including:

- Oral, anal, and vaginal sex or touching the genitals (penis, testicles, labia, and vagina) or anus (butt) of a person with monkeypox.
- Hugging, massage, and kissing.
- Touching fabrics and objects during sex that were used by a person with monkeypox and that have not been disinfected, such as bedding, towels, fetish gear, and sex toys.

## What are the symptoms of monkeypox?

- Monkeypox symptoms usually start within 2 weeks of exposure to the virus.
  - The first symptoms might be like the flu, such as fever, headache, muscle aches and backache, swollen lymph nodes, chills, or exhaustion.
  - Within 1-3 days of these symptoms beginning, people develop a rash or sores.
- The rash or sores may be located on or near the genitals or anus but could also be on other areas like the hands, feet, chest, or face.
  - The sores will go through several stages, including scabs, before healing.
  - The sores can look like pimples or blisters and may be painful or itchy.
  - Sores may be inside the body, including the mouth, vagina, or anus.



You may experience all or only a few of these symptoms. Most people with monkeypox will get the rash or sores. Some people have reported developing the rash or sores before (or without) the flu-like symptoms.

Monkeypox can be spread from the time symptoms start until all sores, including scabs, have healed and a fresh layer of skin has formed. This can take several weeks.

## What are researchers investigating?

- If the virus can be spread when someone has no symptoms.
- If the virus could be present in semen (cum), vaginal fluids, and fecal matter (poop).

## How can a person lower the chance of getting monkeypox at places like raves, parties, clubs, and festivals?

When thinking about what to do, seek out information from trusted sources like the local health department. Second, consider how much close, personal, skin-to-skin contact is likely to occur at the event you plan to attend. If you feel sick or have any rashes or sores, do not attend any gathering, and see a healthcare provider.

- Festivals, events, and concerts where attendees are fully clothed and unlikely to share skin-to-skin contact are safer. However, attendees should be mindful of activities (like kissing) that might spread monkeypox.
- A rave, party, or club where there is minimal clothing and where there is direct, personal, often skin-to-skin contact has some risk. Avoid any rashes or sores you see on others and consider minimizing skin-to-skin contact when possible.
- Enclosed spaces, such as back rooms, saunas, or sex clubs, where there is minimal or no clothing and where intimate sexual contact occurs have a higher likelihood of spreading monkeypox.



## How can a person lower their risk during sex?

Talk to your partner about any recent illness and be aware of new or unexplained sores or rashes on your body or your partner's body, including the genitals and anus. If you or your partner have recently been sick, currently feel sick, or have a new or an unexplained rash or sores, do not have sex and see a healthcare provider. This is always a good plan, even if monkeypox isn't in your area.

If you or a partner has monkeypox, the best way to protect yourself and others is to not have sex of any kind (oral, anal, vaginal) and not kiss or touch each other's bodies while you are sick, especially any rash or sores. Do not share things like towels, fetish gear, sex toys, and toothbrushes.

If you or your partner have (or think you might have) monkeypox and you decide to have sex, consider the following to reduce the chance of spreading the virus:

- Have virtual sex with no in-person contact.
- Masturbate together at a distance of at least 6 feet, without touching each other and without touching any rash or sores.
- Consider having sex with your clothes on or covering areas where rash or sores are present, reducing as much skin-to-skin contact as possible.
- Avoid kissing.
- Remember to wash your hands, fetish gear, sex toys and any fabrics (bedding, towels, clothing) after having sex.
- Limit your number of partners to avoid opportunities for monkeypox to spread.

## What should a person do if they have a new or unexplained rash, sores, or other symptoms?

- Avoid sex or being intimate with anyone until you have been checked out by a healthcare provider. If you don't have a provider or health insurance, visit a public health clinic near you.
- When you see a healthcare provider, remind them that this virus is circulating in the area.
- Avoid gatherings, especially if they involve close, personal, skin-to-skin contact.
- Think about the people you have had close, personal, or sexual contact within the last 21 days, including people you met through dating apps. You might be asked to share this information if you have received a monkeypox diagnosis, to help stop the spread.