

Elderly Alaska man is first reported person to die of recently discovered Alskapox virus

February 13 2024



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

An elderly man has died from Alskapox, the first known fatality from the recently discovered virus, state health officials said.

The man, who lived in the remote Kenai Peninsula, was hospitalized last November and died in late January, according to a [bulletin](#) last week from Alaska public health officials.

The man was undergoing [cancer treatment](#) and had a suppressed immune system because of the drugs, which may have contributed to the severity of his illness, the bulletin said. It described him as elderly but didn't provide his age.

Alaskapox, also known as AKPV, is related to smallpox, cowpox and mpox, health officials said. Symptoms can include a rash, swollen lymph nodes and joint or muscle pain.

Only six other cases of the [virus](#) have been reported to Alaska health officials since the first one in 2015. All involved people were living in the Fairbanks area, more than 300 miles (483 kilometers) from the Kenai Peninsula, [health officials](#) said.

All had mild cases and recovered without being hospitalized.

The man who died "resided alone in a forested area and reported no recent travel and no close contacts with recent travel, illness, or similar lesions," the health bulletin said.

It's unclear how AKPV is transmitted but researchers say it may be zoonotic, meaning it can jump from animals to humans. The bulletin said that tests found evidence of current or previous infection in several species of small mammals in the Fairbanks area, including red-backed voles, and at least one domestic pet.

The man said he had cared for a stray cat at his home, the bulletin said.

The cat tested negative for the virus but it "regularly hunted small mammals and frequently scratched the patient," the bulletin said.

That opens the possibility that the cat had the virus on its claws when it scratched him. The bulletin said a "notable" scratch near the armpit area

where the first symptom—a red lesion—was noted.

Health officials said there hasn't been any documented cases of humans passing on the virus but they recommended people with [skin lesions](#) possibly caused by Alaskapox to cover the affected area with a bandage."

Other suggestions are thoroughly washing hands, avoid sharing clothing that might have touched the lesions and to launder clothing and sheets separately from other household items.

Health authorities also urged Alaskans to follow federal health precautions when around wildlife to avoid potential Alaskapox infections.

The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) recommends washing hands with soap and water after contacting wild animals or their feces. Hunters should always wear gloves when handling dead animals, even if they are freshly killed, the agency suggests.

© 2024 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Elderly Alaska man is first reported person to die of recently discovered Alaskapox virus (2024, February 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-02-elderly-alaska-person-die-alaskapox.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--