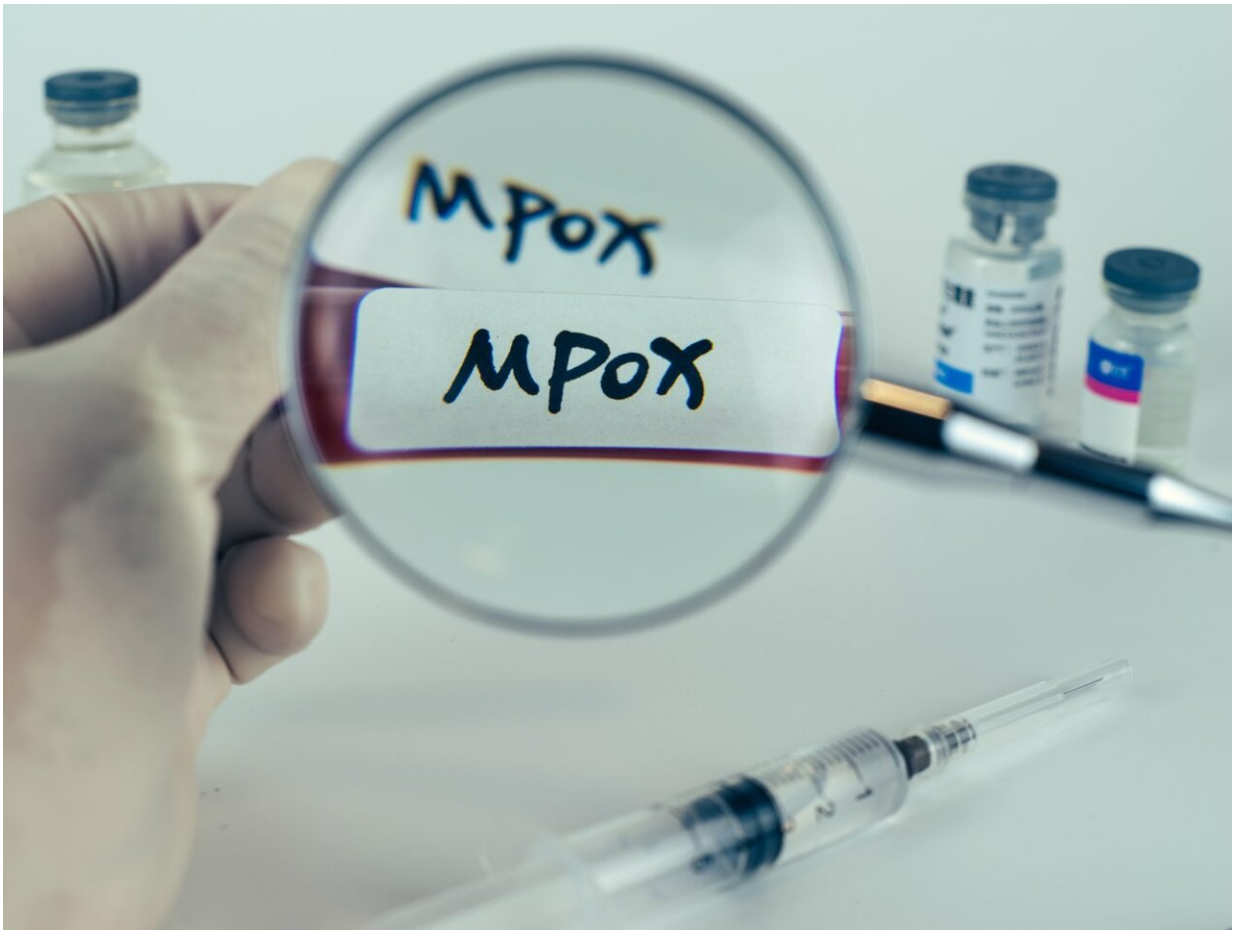


# What is mpox, and how you can protect yourself

March 4 2024, by Ernie Mundell

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An outbreak of mpox (formerly known as monkeypox) across Europe

and North America made headlines in 2022.

According to [data](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the 2022 outbreak of mpox (formerly called monkeypox) in the United States involved 31,698 known cases and 56 deaths. Globally, the outbreak involved almost 93,500 cases.

Mpox hasn't gone away, and new cases of the infectious viral illness could re-emerge, experts warn. Knowing how to protect yourself and others is key.

## What is mpox?

According to Dr. Prithish Tosh, an infectious disease specialist at the Mayo Clinic, mpox is caused by the mpox [virus](#), which is typically confined to rodents or monkeys but can make the leap to people.

Mpox is largely endemic to Central and West Africa, but cases outside of the continent can spread to other regions due to the importation of animals, travel by infected people, or close contact with a person/animal carrying the disease.

## How does mpox spread?

A person can contract mpox from the bite or scratch of an infected animal, or by touching the animal's body, Tosh said. You can also get mpox by eating cooked meat from an infected animal. Even the skins or furs of infected animals could pass along the virus.

In North America, people are more likely to contract mpox through direct physical contact with an infected person. The virus spreads easily via skin-to-[skin contact](#). Infection can happen if you have direct contact

with a person exhibiting an mpox rash or scabs, or if you come into contact with the body fluids of an infected person, as can happen during sex.

Respiratory transmission (breathing in virus) is rare, but can happen if you're in close contact with an infected person for more than four hours at a stretch, Tosh said.

Even contact with the towels, sheets and clothing of a person carrying mpox can pass along the infection.

Infected women can pass along the virus to their fetus.

## **Know the symptoms of mpox**

Most symptoms emerge within three to 17 days of being exposed to the virus, Tosh said. Symptoms include fever, skin rash, swollen lymph nodes, headache, muscle ache, backache, chills and fatigue.

A painful skin rash characteristic of mpox typically begins one to four days after the onset of fever.

"The mpox rash often first appears on the face, hands or feet and then spreads to other parts of the body," Tosh said. "But in cases linked to the outbreak that started in 2022, the rash often started in the genital area, mouth or throat. The mpox rash goes through many stages. Flat spots turn into blisters. Then the blisters fill with pus, scab over and fall off over a period of two to four weeks."

Anyone who believes they may have mpox should see their doctor immediately.

## How serious is mpox?

Deaths from mpox can occur, but are very rare. However, there can be severe complications, including blindness and severe scarring on the face, arms and legs.

## How is mpox treated?

Most treatment is aimed at easing symptoms—staying hydrated, managing skin damage and pain relief.

"Health care professionals may treat mpox with some [antiviral drugs](#) used to treat smallpox, such as tecovirimat (TPOXX) or brincidofovir (Tembexa)," Tosh said.

It's imperative that if you know you have mpox, you isolate at home in a separate room from family or pets, to stop the spread of the disease.

## How to prevent mpox

Get vaccinated.

"Some smallpox vaccines can prevent mpox, including the ACAM2000 and [Jynneos](#) vaccines," Tosh said. "These vaccines can be used to prevent mpox because smallpox and mpox are caused by related viruses."

Because mpox remains rare, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is not recommending vaccination for everyone at this time. The 2022 mpox outbreak mainly involved men who have sex with men, and many men in that risk group did opt for vaccination at the time.

Mpox is also highly preventable with a few simple steps:

Avoid contact with people that have a rash resembling mpox. This includes contact with the clothes, sheets, blankets and towels used by the person.

Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water if you think you've had contact.

Avoid animals that might carry the virus.

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Citation: What is mpox, and how you can protect yourself (2024, March 4) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-03-mpox.html>

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