

FAQs about Monkeypox for School Settings

What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is an illness caused by the monkeypox virus. It is a virus that can spread from animals to humans and from person to person.

Is monkeypox a risk for children?

The risk of children getting infected with monkeypox virus is very, very low. As of August 3, 2022, <0.1% of all cases have been in children.

What are the symptoms of monkeypox in children?

Rash is the most common monkeypox symptom, and it can look like many other rashes that are seen in kids, like chickenpox or herpes. It is very round and examples are shown below.

The rash typically begins as scattered, raised, and reddish, and then may look like fluid-filled bumps, pustules, and scabs. All parts of the rash will look the same at the same time, which makes it different from other conditions like chickenpox. The rash can be painful. Sometimes before the rash appears, children have fever, swollen lymph nodes, fatigue and headache. Symptoms usually start within 3 weeks of exposure to the virus.



Are these symptoms very different compared to what infected adults experience?

The first monkeypox cases looked similar to smallpox with many bumps on the face and body. The recent monkeypox cases among adults have appeared more like sexually transmitted infections, with bumps in the genital area. There have not been many cases among children, but the symptoms have been similar to adults and include rash (bumps on the skin) that can be painful and some fever and swollen lymph nodes.

Are there any symptoms of monkeypox that have to be present in order for it to be monkeypox? If my child has a fever but no rash, should I be less worried?

The rash is one of the most common presentations seen with this virus. Some people will also have fever, swollen lymph nodes, and tiredness. In fact, the diagnosis of monkeypox is made by rubbing a cotton swab on the characteristic rash/bumps on the body.

How is monkeypox spread?

Monkeypox may spread through close, personal, usually skin-to-skin contact, including:

- Direct contact with monkeypox rash, scabs or body fluids from a person with monkeypox, including sexual contact.
- Touching objects, fabrics (clothing, bedding or towels) and surfaces that have been used by someone with monkeypox.
- Contact with respiratory secretions.

The highest risk activity at present is sex with multiple or anonymous partners. Avoiding these activities greatly reduces the risk of catching or spreading monkeypox.

Monkeypox does **not** spread from person to person through:

- Walking by someone who is infected
- Casual conversation with someone infected

Monkeypox remains contagious until the scabs fall off and new skin has formed, which can take 2-4 weeks.

If monkeypox is spread through close contact, how can my child be safe at school or childcare? Kids are always playing closely with each other!

It is important for kids to play together but it is also true that some viruses and bacteria can be spread from close contact. That is exactly why it's so important that kids stay home when they're sick and practice frequent hand-washing. Schools and childcare facilities should also continue to do regular environmental cleaning of surfaces and toys that helps to reduce the spread of all kinds of germs. Monkeypox virus is being spread by close skin-to-skin contact and cases among kids are not common so far. What is very important is the follow-up by public health officials that is done when a case is recognized. This helps to limit further spread.

Are monkeypox outbreaks likely to cause schools to close?

No. There are many illnesses that can spread from one person to another and there are a few general things we do to keep that from happening. It is always important to stay home when you are sick (including if you have a new rash or fever) and to practice frequent hand-washing. These methods help limit the spread of illness, including monkeypox. When a person is diagnosed with monkeypox, public health professionals identify those who had close contact with the individual to offer advice and treatment options, including information about how to clean surfaces and shared spaces. There would not be a need to close a school to stop the spread of the virus, but school officials will consult with the local health department.

I saw a child at school who had a rash that looked concerning. As a teacher or a parent, what should I do?

There are many causes for a rash, including viruses or bacteria, allergies, and even birthmarks can have a rash-like appearance to others. If you have a concern about a child's health, you can reach out to the teacher or school nurse. If you have a general question, you can also reach out to public health professionals or healthcare providers.

If my child has a rash and I'm not sure what it is, do I have to keep my child at home?

There are many rashes that might be contagious, so we recommend that you see your child's doctor if you are concerned. Also, in many situations, keeping rashes covered sometimes helps to prevent spread, no matter the cause.

I've heard that people can have monkeypox and not even have symptoms. Is this true?

While monkeypox is not a new virus and has been endemic (well-known) to other parts of the world, it has been rare in the United States. At this time, there is not good data to show that people can have or spread it without symptoms, though scientists will monitor this in months ahead. Like any other new or emerging illness, as we learn new information or if the situation changes, public health and healthcare providers will share updated information.

Can people spread monkeypox even when they have no symptoms?

Although the incubation period can be 1-3 weeks, a person does not appear to be contagious during this period. They are contagious when they have symptoms. Over the coming months, scientists will watch closely.

What about sports such as wrestling?

If a case is identified that increases the risk for a group like wrestlers or a similar activity, public health professionals will provide advice on adjusting or pausing those activities to reduce risk. It is always important to continue the regular environmental and surface cleaning that prevents the spread of disease. A child who has a new rash or doesn't feel well should not participate in group activities.

Do kids need a vaccine for monkeypox?

Right now the risk to the general public is low. The vaccine that protects against monkeypox is being given to people who have had close contact with someone who is sick with monkeypox. It should be given within 4 days of exposure. Focusing on these close contacts helps create a "ring" of protection to keep the virus from spreading further. Only people who are at high risk because of an exposure or because they belong to a high risk group (like men who have sex with men) are recommended to receive the vaccine right now.

If someone has had close contact with someone with monkeypox, they will be offered the vaccine (including kids). Otherwise, it is not necessary for everyone to have this vaccine right now.

Is there a treatment for monkeypox?

Most cases require only supportive care (pain management, hydration). However, in those that are high risk (under age 8 and immunocompromised) there are antiviral medications that can be prescribed. These are under emergency use authorization.

Who is at most risk for serious disease if they catch monkeypox?

So far, most cases of monkeypox have not required hospitalization and there have not been any deaths reported in Virginia. However, reported symptoms have included fever, tiredness, and painful rash. There are some people who might become sicker because their immune systems have a harder time clearing the virus. This includes people who have cancer or are getting treatment for cancer or people with illnesses that affect how well their immune system works, like HIV. Other risk groups include pregnant women, those who are immunocompromised, and children less than 8 years.

Will schools shut down the playgrounds this year or limit sharing of toys?

There are no plans to shut down playgrounds or limit sharing of toys. Just like any other virus or bacteria that can move from one person to another, it is important to practice frequent hand-washing and standard environmental cleaning. It is also important that anyone who does not feel well stays home from work and school. This helps to limit the spread of illness and keep kids healthy year-round.

What are schools doing to make sure monkeypox isn't spreading without people noticing?

Schools have always worked closely with public health and healthcare providers to keep their schools healthy. First, we want to make sure people have easy access to accurate information about the virus and how to protect themselves in their lives outside of school. Schools continue to remind families to stay home when sick and practice frequent hand-washing. Schools will also work with public health professionals if a case is identified in a child who was in school, so that anyone who might be at higher risk can be contacted and may be offered a vaccination to protect against monkeypox. Schools will adjust to protect our children, with the support of the health departments who are monitoring the disease closely.

Can I catch monkeypox from a desk or toilet seat?

It is possible that the monkeypox virus can be transmitted by touching contaminated objects; however, this is NOT the main way that people are getting sick. Most cases are the result of close skin-to-skin contact, especially during sexual contact.

How much monkeypox is out in the community right now?

As of August 5, 2022, there have been 7,510 confirmed cases of monkeypox in the United States. This outbreak is part of a larger global outbreak (>30,189 cases) that is occurring in 88 locations (countries, territories, and areas). In Virginia, as of August 9, 2022, there are 157 cases reported statewide. Up-to-date information can be found on the VDH website.

When should a child be tested for monkeypox?

Anyone with symptoms of monkeypox should talk to their child's doctor. Doctors who suspect monkeypox based on the appearance of rash and a child's history will consult with infectious disease experts and/or local public health authorities to determine if testing is indicated.

How worried do I need to be about monkeypox risk, for example, compared to RSV or chickenpox or flu?

Some common illnesses have a seasonal pattern, and there can be increases in cases when kids go back to school and are in closer proximity to each other. This is true of illnesses like influenza, RSV, and chicken pox. For diseases that have a regular vaccination available, like flu and chicken pox, it is helpful for everyone to vaccinate in order to protect themselves and their loved ones from getting sick or having complications from the disease. Even in years when the flu vaccine is not a perfect match, it decreases the risk of getting very sick and dying from flu. The COVID-19 vaccine also decreases the risk of serious illness.

Right now, kids are not at high risk for contracting monkeypox. Most cases have been related to close skin-to-skin contact, especially during intimate or sexual contact. However, anyone with close skin-to-skin contact with someone who is sick with monkeypox could be at risk. This is why it's so important to stay home when you are sick, practice frequent hand-washing, and follow the latest information from public health and healthcare professionals.

What if a student has a rash suspicious for monkeypox?

The child should have mask put in place and should be sent to the nurse's office. The child will be sent home and parents can contact a healthcare provider.

How should schools clean areas after a suspected monkeypox case?

Use an EPA-registered disinfectant in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Wear clothing that covers the skin, gloves and a mask to clean the area. Clean areas that were in direct contact with the skin of the person with monkeypox. Do not dust or sweep to avoid spreading infectious particles. Wet cleaning is preferred and vacuuming is acceptable. Collect and seal any solid waste. After cleaning, use hand hygiene after gloves are taken off. Launder the clothes that were worn and throw out the mask and gloves. Refer to CDC disinfection instructions for more detailed information.

If a child has monkeypox, when can they come back to school?

Children can return when all lesions have completely healed, which may take up to 3 weeks. Schools should have an alternate plan for learning during this time.

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