

## What you need to know about monkeypox

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared monkeypox a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). And considering our recent COVID-19 experience, you may very well feel like the pandemic is about to kick-start all over again.

Rest assured that the dynamics so far around the monkeypox outbreak are quite different to what we saw in the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak.

That said, it is still important that you understand the monkeypox outbreak.

### A bit of history about monkeypox

The first human case of monkeypox was recorded in 1970 and this disease has affected people in Central and West Africa for decades. It's been controlled well through simple measures like isolating infected people.

The WHO's recent declaration of a Public Health Emergency follows a change in how monkeypox spreads, as it has spread to other continents rapidly. At this time there are 16,000 recorded cases across more than 70 countries. The disease is spreading in countries that have not historically reported monkeypox infections and through new modes of transmission, which are not yet fully understood.

Of all the cases recorded in this outbreak, there are only five confirmed deaths.

### Why has the WHO declared a Public Health Emergency (PHEIC)?

Declaring a PHEIC is the highest level of alert by the WHO. It's intended to send a powerful signal to countries to initiate urgent action to combat the spread of the disease and to mobilise resources to fund research on diagnostics, treatments and vaccines. It also obligates countries to share information with the WHO, to monitor the spread of infections globally. In short, PHEIC status raises awareness, triggers action, and ensures notifiable reporting of cases.

### Where has monkeypox spread to?

The WHO's assessment is that the risk of monkeypox is moderate in all regions globally, except for in the European region. Countries with the highest number of reported infections to date are Spain (3,125), the USA (2,316), Germany (2,191), UK (2,137) and France (1,449).

As of 22 June 2022, only three cases of monkeypox has been confirmed in South Africa. These cases have been appropriately isolated, and their contacts traced to limit the spread of infection. To the best of our understanding, all three patients have experienced mild illness.

### Monkeypox is different to COVID-19

To set your mind at ease, here are some ways in which monkeypox differs from COVID-19:

- Monkeypox is a well-known, typically rare viral disease that has been around for a long time. COVID-19 developed from a newly identified Coronavirus that quickly became global.
- Monkeypox is significantly less contagious than the SARS-CoV-2 virus which causes COVID-19. The current outbreak of monkeypox appears to be transmitted through direct bodily fluid contact, whereas COVID-19 spread posed a much higher person-to-person transmission risk through proximity to an infected individual.
- Monkeypox is almost never fatal, and typically resolves naturally.

- Monkeypox is highly unlikely to have the global healthcare and economic consequences of COVID-19.

### How does it spread?

- The monkeypox virus is transmitted from one person to another by close contact with skin and mucosal lesions, body fluids, respiratory droplets, and even contaminated materials such as bedding.
- The risks of infection appear to be increased in people who have multiple sexual partners. There have also been reports of increased spread at large social events where there is close physical contact.

### What are the symptoms?

- Monkeypox symptoms typically last two to four weeks and includes fever and general flu-like symptoms, often followed by a blister-like rash.
- The disease is rarely fatal, and typically resolves without requiring treatment. Severe cases may occur especially in new-born babies, children, and people with immune system deficiencies, but these are rare.

### How to prevent monkeypox infection

The risk of encountering monkeypox is low, but it's still important to be cautious. The best ways to prevent monkeypox infection are to:

- Avoid contact with people who are suspected or known to be infected with the virus
- Avoid contact with bedding and other materials that may be contaminated with the virus
- Practice safe sex (by for example using condoms and dental dams)
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

### We will keep you informed and updated

Just as we have done over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Discovery Health will cooperate closely with healthcare professionals and government organisations. We will monitor our own data closely and keep you updated on any significant developments.

You can keep up to date on the latest available research and information on monkeypox [on the NICD website](#). You can also access the [WHO](#) updates for global data.