

# UW-Health: Expert explains monkeypox symptoms, spread

Posted on Friday, Aug 5, 2022

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON, Wis. – Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, another virus is circulating around the world.

On Aug. 4, the United States declared monkeypox a national health emergency. The World Health Organization also recently declared the virus a global health emergency.

An expert from UW Health offered information to help the public understand the risks, symptoms and options for prevention and treatment of monkeypox.

Monkeypox comes from the same family of viruses as smallpox, according to Dr. Dan Shirley, medical director, infection prevention, UW Health, and assistant professor of medicine at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. While it is less transmissible and typically less severe than smallpox, it is still a potentially serious disease, he said.

The common symptoms include fever, chills, muscle aches and swollen lymph nodes, but the key distinguishing symptom of monkeypox is new, unexplained skin lesions, which can appear like abnormal bumps, blisters, ulcers or sores, according to Shirley.

There are a few ways monkeypox spreads, he said.

“Monkeypox is primarily spread from close, extended contact with an infected individual’s rash, lesions, or possibly body fluids,” Shirley said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, monkeypox can also spread from a pregnant person to their fetus, and it can spread from animals to

people if the person is scratched or bitten by the animal, or if the person uses or ingests an animal product from an infected animal.

While there are many differences between monkeypox and COVID-19, there are many lessons we can take from dealing with the pandemic, Shirley said.

For example, the most important prevention tactic is to avoid close contact with individuals who have a known monkeypox infection or symptoms concerning for this diagnosis. It is especially important to avoid contact with the individual's rash, lesions or sores, he said.

It is also recommended to avoid sharing bedsheets, towels, or eating/drinking utensils with someone who has symptoms of monkeypox while further research about the spread of this disease is ongoing.

"If you have been exposed to someone with monkeypox, monitor for symptoms and contact your healthcare provider," Shirley said.

The disease is a public health concern for everyone, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Early research indicates the most common risk factor is the very close skin-to-skin contact associated with sexual contact, according to Shirley, which is a reminder of the importance of safe sex practices such as condom use.

As of Aug. 3, more than 20 cases of monkeypox have been confirmed in Wisconsin. Illinois has so far confirmed approximately 570 cases. More than 6,600 cases have been confirmed across the United States.

"The risk of contracting it is still low, but it is still very important to be mindful of symptoms and avoid contracting it and spreading it," Shirley said. "It is still a painful disease even in mild cases and can lead to severe disease in some."

According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, monkeypox vaccines are available to people who have known close contact with an identified case of monkeypox or to people who have certain risk factors that make them more likely to have been exposed to monkeypox. At this time, vaccination is only available at select healthcare locations.

If a person contracts monkeypox, they most often do not need medical intervention. Monkeypox can spread from the time symptoms start until the rash has fully healed and a fresh layer of skin has formed. This can take several weeks. Research is

ongoing, and there are still several unknowns, according to Shirley.

“As health experts learn more, risk factors, prevention measures, and advice are likely to evolve,” he said.

A recorded interview with Shirley is available and he is available for interviews on this topic.