

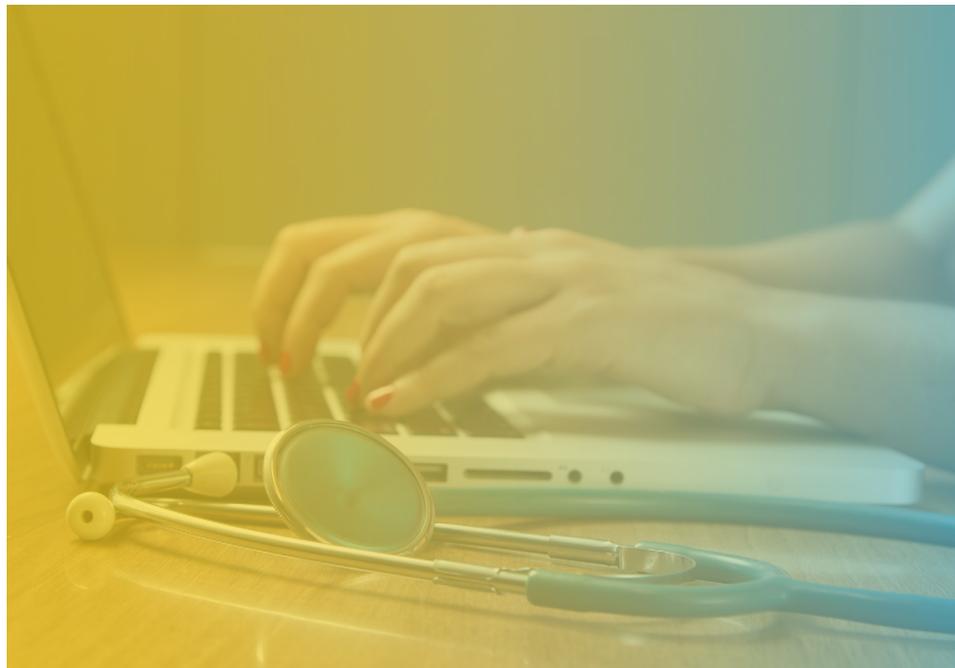
# Monkeypox and the Workplace: What You Need to Know

## What is Monkeypox?

**MPX** is a viral disease caused by infection with the monkeypox virus, a relative of smallpox.

Common symptoms of the virus include:

- Fever
- Skin rash
- Headache
- Muscle and back aches
- Chills
- Tiredness
- Swollen lymph nodes



## How is Monkeypox Spread?

MPX is typically spread through prolonged skin-to-skin contact, as well as exposure to contaminated materials and fabrics. Many in the medical field claim that the virus cannot spread through brief interactions such as handshakes, quick hugs, or sharing a toilet seat. Additionally, while there are chances of the virus spreading through the air as a result of lesions within the throat, it is extremely unlikely.<sup>1</sup>

## Guidance for the Workplace

The Mayo Clinic declared that the general public is currently not at high risk of contracting MPX.<sup>2</sup> However, employers should understand how the virus spreads and what symptoms are, as well as steps that they can take to prevent infection among their employees, including those who may be particularly susceptible.

Employees whose job regularly exposes them to skin-to-skin contact or the handling of used linens and other materials that may have touched skin, such those who work in **healthcare, hospitality, and the service industry**, could be at increased risk and it is recommended to wear gloves to reduce risk of transmission.<sup>3</sup>

If someone in your office or location is infected with MPX, be sure to follow CDC guidelines for **sanitizing congregate spaces** to prevent further spread.

1 <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-news/Pages/Monkeypox-Not-Likely-to-Spread-Through-Workplace-Travel.aspx>

2 <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-news/pages/monkeypox-whos-at-risk-at-work.aspx>

3 <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-news/pages/monkeypox-whos-at-risk-at-work.aspx>

## Isolation, Sick Leave, and Return to Work Policies

There are many things to consider if someone at your company has MPX. The CDC recommends that those with MPX isolate for 2-4 weeks or as long as it takes for all MPX symptoms to subside. For those with a rash, all scabs must be fully healed with a new layer of skin before ending the isolation period.<sup>4</sup>

During isolation, someone infected with MPX may experience extreme discomfort and other symptoms that will leave them unable to perform their professional responsibilities—affecting their physical, mental, and emotional health.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, employers should consider policies that allow those with monkeypox to take additional paid sick leave as needed.

For those who feel well enough to work during this period, companies should allow them to work from home where possible, despite any return-to-work policies that may be in place.

Due to privacy concerns, lack of sick leave, and/or severity of symptoms, some may opt for unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act or filing for short-term disability.



## Vaccines

There are currently a limited number of vaccines for the monkeypox virus. HR departments should maintain consistent familiarization with the continually updated information from the [Centers for Disease Control](#) on who in the United States is eligible for the vaccine.

## Monkeypox and the LGBTQ+ Community

Data suggest that the current outbreak of MPX is primarily spreading among LGBTQ+ people, particularly men who have sex with men and those within their networks.<sup>6 7</sup> **However, it is vital to note that the virus can and has spread to anyone regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and travel history.**

Because of the nature of outbreaks and the reporting around them, some within the LGBTQ+ community might experience increased anxiety about the health of themselves and their loved ones, as well as biased or stereotype-driven comments regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity. For example, someone may be hesitant to speak openly about how they spent their weekend if they fear being judged or isolated because of the current outbreak. Alternatively, someone may have contracted the virus and feel like they cannot be open about it because they fear rumors might spread about their identity. Although these examples are hypothetical, it is still important to recognize that actual scenarios may arise for your employees and their loved ones which will have real effects on their daily lives.

4 <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/clinicians/isolation-procedures.html>

5 <https://hbr.org/2022/08/what-employers-need-to-know-about-monkeypox>

6 While this is language often used by the CDC and other institutions, it may leave out those who are also at risk, despite not being a man. This includes people who are transgender and nonbinary, as well as cisgender women.

7 <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/prevention.html#:~:text=At%20this%20time%2C%20data%20suggest,has%20monkeypox%20is%20at%20risk>

## What You Can Do:

**Be vigilant** of sexual orientation or gender identity-based discrimination, harassment, and retaliation in the workplace and ensure that your team managers and HR department are equipped to investigate any complaints based on your company's nondiscrimination policies.

**Leverage ERGs as Support Systems:** ERGs are key players in monitoring the emotional well-being of group members during the MPX outbreak, as well as providing a sense of community support and belonging. Companies should support ERGs to facilitate regular check-ins with their member base to assess well-being, connect on shared coping skills, and identify needs and concerns.

**Offer Domestic Partner Benefits:** Regardless of marriage benefits that are already in place, domestic partner benefits that are inclusive of both same and different sex partners ensure that all families, including LGBTQ employees, have the time and resources they need to care for their partners if they fall sick. This should also be taken into consideration if and when amending your paid family and sick leave policies, including ensuring domestic partnerships are covered in your paid leave policies.

**Provide Support for Mental and Emotional Wellbeing:** Apart from policy updates and accommodating remote work, companies can also care for their employees' emotional and mental health during this time. Managers should be aware of and be communicating any Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that is available, which can be beneficial in providing a range of services, like short-term counseling, to employees coping with these major life changes and issues. Your company can also **provide LGBTQ+-specific mental health resources:**

**Trevor Lifeline:** An LGBTQ-specific crisis intervention and suicide prevention phone service conducted by the Trevor Project, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: **1-866-488-7386**

**SAGE LGBT Elder Hotline:** A 24-hour hotline dedicated to LGBTQ older people needing support or dealing with crisis: **877-360-5428**

**Trans Lifeline:** a peer support service line for transgender people in crisis, run by trans-identified individuals: **877-565-8860**

**998 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** 988 is now active across the United States. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in distress, prevention, and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States.

**Learn How to Talk About Monkeypox in the Workplace:** For more information on LGBTQ+ inclusive communications regarding monkeypox, reference this [Special Advisory](#) from the Association of LGBTQ Journalists.

## Additional Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Monkeypox
- World Health Organization – Monkeypox Outbreak
- Department of Health and Human Services – Response to the Monkeypox Outbreak
- What Employers Need to Know About Monkeypox – Harvard Business Review
- Monkeypox: Who's at Risk at Work? - SHRM
- Monkeypox: Key Considerations for Employers – Health Action Alliance
- [Click here to access the most recent MPX case numbers in the United States.](#)
- [Click here to access the most recent MPX case numbers globally.](#)