

Safer Sex, Social Gatherings, and Monkeypox

Updated September 9, 2022

While CDC works to contain the current monkeypox outbreak and learn more about the virus, this information can help you make informed choices when you are in situations or places where monkeypox could be spread. Monkeypox is often transmitted through close, sustained physical contact, almost exclusively associated with sexual contact in the current outbreak.

How can a person lower their risk during sex?

Vaccination is an important tool in preventing the spread of monkeypox. But given the current limited supply of vaccine, consider temporarily changing some behaviors that may increase your risk of being exposed. These temporary changes will help slow the spread of monkeypox until vaccine supply is adequate.

Reducing or avoiding behaviors that increase risk of monkeypox exposure is also important when you are between your first and second shots of vaccine. Your protection will be highest two weeks after your second dose of vaccine.

Make a habit of exchanging contact information with any new partner to allow for sexual health follow-up, if needed.

Talk with your partner about any monkeypox symptoms and be aware of any new or unexplained rash or lesion on either of your bodies, including the mouth, genitals (penis, testicles, vulva, or vagina), or anus (butthole). If you or your partner has or recently had monkeypox symptoms, or you have a new or unexplained rash anywhere on your body, do not have sex and see a healthcare provider. In some cases, symptoms may be mild, and some people may not even know they have monkeypox.

If you or a partner has monkeypox or think you may have monkeypox, the best way to protect yourself and others is to avoid sex of any kind (oral, anal, vaginal) and kissing or touching each other's bodies—while you are sick. **Especially avoid touching any rash.** Do not share things like towels, fetish gear, sex toys, and toothbrushes.

Even if you feel well, here are some ways to reduce your chances of being exposed to monkeypox if you are sexually active:

- Take a temporary break from activities that increase exposure to monkeypox until you are two weeks after your second dose. This will greatly reduce your risk.

- Limit your number of sex partners to reduce your likelihood of exposure.
- Spaces like back rooms, saunas, sex clubs, or private and public sex parties, where intimate, often anonymous sexual contact with multiple partners occurs—are more likely to spread monkeypox.
- Condoms (latex or polyurethane) may protect your anus (butthole), mouth, penis, or vagina from exposure to monkeypox. However, condoms alone may not prevent all exposures to monkeypox since the rash can occur on other parts of the body.
- Gloves (latex, polyurethane, or nitrile) might also reduce the possibility of exposure if inserting fingers or hands into the vagina or the anus. The gloves must cover all exposed skin and be removed carefully to avoid touching the outer surface.
- Avoid kissing or exchanging spit since monkeypox can spread this way.
- Masturbate together at a distance without touching each other and without touching any rash.
- Have virtual sex with no in-person contact.
- Consider having sex with your clothes on or covering areas where rash is present, reducing as much skin-to-skin contact as possible. Leather or latex gear also provides a barrier to skin-to-skin contact; just be sure to change or clean clothes/gear between partners and after use.
- Be aware that monkeypox can also spread through respiratory secretions with close, face-to-face contact.
- Remember to wash your hands, fetish gear, sex toys, and any fabrics (bedding, towels, clothes) after having sex.

What should a person do if they have a new or unexplained rash or other symptoms?

- Avoid sex or being intimate with anyone until you have been checked out by a healthcare provider.
- If you don't have a provider or health insurance, visit a public health clinic near you.
- When you see a healthcare provider, wear a mask, and remind them that this virus is circulating in the area.
- Avoid gatherings, especially if they involve close, personal, skin-to-skin contact.

Think about the people you have had close, personal, or sexual contact during the last 21 days, including people you met through dating apps. To help stop the spread, you might be asked to share this information if you have received a monkeypox diagnosis.

How can a person lower the chance of getting monkeypox at places like raves, parties, clubs, and festivals?

When thinking about what to do, seek out information from trusted sources like the local health department. Second, consider how much close, personal, skin-to-skin contact is likely to occur at the event you plan to attend. If you feel sick or have a rash, do not attend any gathering, and see a healthcare provider.

- Festivals, events, and concerts where attendees are fully clothed and unlikely to share skin-to-skin contact are safer. However, attendees should be mindful of activities (like kissing) that might spread monkeypox.
- A rave, party, or club where there is minimal clothing and where there is direct, personal, often skin-to-skin contact has some risk. Avoid any rash you see on others and consider minimizing skin-to-skin contact.
- Enclosed spaces, such as back rooms, saunas, sex clubs, or private and public sex parties where intimate, often anonymous sexual contact with multiple partners occurs, may have a higher likelihood of spreading monkeypox.