

Mpox & Food Service Workers



Washtenaw County
Health Department

What is mpox?

Mpox (previously called “monkeypox”) is a rare but potentially serious viral illness that can cause flu-like symptoms and a rash that is often painful or itchy. It can be spread from person to person through direct contact with rash lesions or body fluids, or through contact with items like fabrics or surfaces that were touched by a person who has mpox. In the current outbreak, people with mpox generally report having had close physical contact with other people who have mpox. The virus has not been shown to spread by casually talking with or walking near a person who is infectious.

What are the symptoms of mpox infection?

Mpox symptoms usually appear 5-14 days after exposure to the virus but may take up to 21 days to appear. The illness typically lasts 2-4 weeks.

People with mpox may first develop a flu-like illness with fever, headache, muscle aches, exhaustion, and enlarged lymph nodes. A characteristic rash, which can appear like blisters, sores, or pimples, occurs a few days later. In the 2022 outbreak, some patients developed rashes around the genitals or anus without having flu-like symptoms first. Sores may be in other areas like the hands, feet, chest, or face. Sores may be painful or itchy.

Sores progress through several stages before falling off. A person is infectious from when any symptoms begin until sores have scabbed over, the scabs have fallen off, and a fresh layer of healthy skin has formed underneath.

Anyone with a known exposure or with symptoms of a new, unexplained rash should isolate at home and contact a healthcare provider for testing and guidance.

How is mpox prevented?

Avoid direct contact with others with symptoms or an unexplained rash. Vaccines are available to help prevent serious illness for people who have been exposed or are at higher risk of infection. Talk to your healthcare provider or the health department about vaccination.

Can a food employee with mpox work?

If a food employee is diagnosed with mpox, the recommendation is to stay home and stay away from others until symptoms have gone away and the rash has fully healed. However, if this is not possible, activities outside of the household, including work as a food employee, are allowed **if**:

1. Fever has been gone for 24 hours, **and**
2. The food employee properly covers any rash lesions, including wearing a double barrier such as an impermeable bandage and disposable gloves when any sores, rashes, or lesions are on the hands/wrists, **and**
3. The food employee wears a close-fitting mask (surgical, KN95, or N95 mask) until all lesions are fully healed.

Does an infected food employee have to tell their manager?

A food employee is not required to tell their manager about a mpox diagnosis, as long as the food employee is not working while sick with a fever or other flu-like symptoms; any sores, rashes, or lesions are properly covered; and the employee is wearing a well-fitting mask.

What steps can be taken to prevent spread in a food service establishment?

Require staff to stay home when sick. Maintain supportive sick leave protocols to encourage this.

Ensure access to handwashing. Encourage good hand hygiene using soap and water.

Limit sharing of personal items. Do not share eating utensils, dishes, or clothing.

Clean and disinfect surfaces routinely. Check that your disinfectant product is [EPA-registered](#).

Contact the Washtenaw County Health Department for more information on mpox, including vaccination. Visit washtenaw.org/monkeypox or call 734-544-6700 for questions or appointments.

References:

[Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook](#), FDA
[Michigan Modified Food Code](#), Sections 2-201.11 and 2-201.12
[Mpox](#), Michigan Department of Health & Human Services



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