What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is a rare disease caused by the monkeypox virus, which belongs to the same group of viruses as smallpox. Monkeypox virus was first found in laboratory monkeys in 1958. It has also been found in different kinds of rodents and primates in Africa.

Who gets monkeypox?

The first and only human cases of monkeypox in the United States occurred in the Midwest in 2003. Before 2003, the only human cases of monkeypox occurred in central and western parts of Africa.

How is monkeypox spread?

Monkeypox virus can spread to people when they are bitten by an animal infected with monkeypox or when they touch the blood, body fluids, or lesions of an infected animal. In the United States in 2003, monkeypox was reported among several people who had contact with sick pet prairie dogs that had contact with imported African rodents. Sometimes, monkeypox virus is spread from person to person through close contact or by touching body fluids of a person with monkeypox. In the United States in 2003, no one got sick from being in contact with another person with monkeypox. Objects, such as bedding or clothing, contaminated with the virus can also spread the monkeypox virus.

What are the symptoms of monkeypox?

In humans, the signs and symptoms of monkeypox are similar to those of smallpox, but they are usually milder. Monkeypox causes fever, headache, backache, swollen lymph nodes (not usually seen in smallpox), sore throat, and cough. One to three days after the onset of fever, a blister-like rash usually appears first on the face and then spreads to other parts of the body. The blisters go through several stages before they get crusty, scab over and fall off. The illness usually lasts for 2–4 weeks. In rare cases, monkeypox can cause death.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 7–14 days after exposure, with a range of 5–21 days.

How is monkeypox diagnosed?

Monkeypox is diagnosed through special laboratory tests on samples taken from people or animals suspected of having monkeypox.

What is the treatment for monkeypox?

Treatment consists of supportive care and relief of symptoms. No proven effective treatment exists to date, although some antiviral medications are being investigated for treating monkeypox.

How can monkeypox be prevented?

There are several steps to take to prevent monkeypox.
Avoid contact with animals that could carry the virus (including animals who are sick or that have been found dead in areas where monkeypox occurs).
Avoid contact with any materials, such as bedding, that have been in contact with a sick animal.
Separate infected patients from others who could be at risk for infection.
Wear proper personal protective equipment when caring for infected patients.
Wash your hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, after caring for infected patients.

Also, the vaccine for smallpox might reduce the chance of getting monkeypox. Smallpox vaccine, however, is not currently available to the general public. If there was an outbreak of monkeypox in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would provide recommendations about who should be vaccinated.

How can I get more information about monkeypox?

If you have concerns about monkeypox, contact your healthcare provider.
Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/.

September 2018