



## Monkeypox virus (MPXV) information for Victorian sex workers

MPXV was Identified as a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance on July 26 2022 by Australia's Chief Medical Officer. Currently there are only 57 cases of MPXV nationally, with 22 cases in Victoria, so it is still very uncommon.

There are a very limited number of vaccines in Australia and worldwide. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has released vaccine recommendations and have recommended vaccine for men who have sex with men (MSM), sex workers, and those travelling to a country with a significant outbreak.

### What is MPXV?

MPXV is a virus that often starts as a flu-like illness and progresses to lumps and lesions on the skin.

It is mostly a mild illness and any treatment for mild illness targets symptom management.

Most people recover on their own in 2-4 weeks.

There is treatment available for those who experience a moderate-severe illness through General Practitioners or via hospital admission.

### How do you get MPXV?

Sex workers are understandably concerned about MPXV as it is transmitted through close contact, however due to the small number of cases, it is currently unlikely that you will come into contact with someone with the virus.

In current cases, transmission has been most common through intimate contact. Transmission occurs from;

- Skin contact with lesions (which might be hard to spot),
- Bodily fluids such as kissing,
- Respiratory droplets; however prolonged face-to-face contact is usually required,
- Contact with contaminated surfaces. MPXV can live on surfaces for some time and so can be transmitted through contact with contaminated surfaces such as clothing, bedding, other surfaces (such as sex toys).

### What are the symptoms?

The current information on presentation and symptom progression is based on a small number of cases.

#### *Prodrome (before the rash)*

- Malaise (feeling generally unwell),
- Fever (common),
- Headache, and flu-like symptoms,
- Swollen lymph glands.

#### *Rash*

- Starts out as a flat, red area,
- Sometimes begins in the mouth,
- Becomes raised, presenting as pimple-like bumps, fluid-filled blisters, or an ulcer. The rash may look similar to herpes or syphilis.
- Develops into scabs that eventually fall off.

There have been variety of presentations. Genital lesions are quite common, however people can present with a rash anywhere including the face. MPXV rash could be itchy or painful.

#### *Examples of lesions:*



Photo: UK Health Security Agency

### How can transmission be prevented?

It is important if you have MPXV you isolate until you have recovered from the virus (when all lesions have scabbed over).

All sex workers who have in-person contact with clients/customers can take some precautions to assist in preventing transmission of MPXV. If conducting client health checks, look out for flu-like symptoms and a rash. If you are concerned a client might have MPXV consider declining the booking and encouraging them to seek medical attention.

For stripping it may be more challenging to determine whether a potential customer has MPXV due to the nature of the work. Prior to going for a dance, look out for flu-like symptoms or a rash on visible skin. Be mindful of the surfaces you are touching, and don't share drinks with others.

As MPXV can be transmitted through skin contact, bodily fluids, and contact with contaminated surfaces, intimate contact with someone with the virus should be avoided.

### Safer-sex practices

Using safe sex supplies such as condoms and dams will not necessarily protect you from MPXV as skin lesions can be found anywhere on the body.

### Vaccination

Victoria is receiving its first delivery of MPXV vaccines this week.

There are a limited number of vaccines currently, so eligibility for the first round of vaccines is limited to those who are currently at the highest risk of contracting the virus.

Victorian sex workers who have penetrative sex with gay and bisexual men, or men who have sex with men (GBM MSM) are eligible in the first stage of the vaccine rollout.

Once supplies of MPXV vaccines increase in Victoria (which is expected to be in September), eligibility criteria will be expanded, however current supplies are being prioritised for those who are most likely to come into contact with someone with MPXV.

Delivery of vaccines are arriving at participating clinics this week. These clinics include:

- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre
- Thorne Harbour Health
- Northside Clinic
- Collins Street Medical Centre
- Prahran Market Clinic

If you live in regional Victoria, vaccines can be accessed through your Local Public Health Unit (LPHU).

- Ovens Murray - [phu@awh.org.au](mailto:phu@awh.org.au)
- Barwon South West - [phu@barwonhealth.org.au](mailto:phu@barwonhealth.org.au)
- Gippsland/La Trobe - [phu@lrh.com.au](mailto:phu@lrh.com.au)
- Goulburn Valley - [phu@gvhealth.org.au](mailto:phu@gvhealth.org.au)
- Ballarat/Grampians - [phu@bhs.org.au](mailto:phu@bhs.org.au)
- Loddon Mallee - [phu@bendigohealth.org.au](mailto:phu@bendigohealth.org.au)

Eligibility criteria (for the first round of vaccines):

- Post exposure prophylaxis for high-risk close contacts of monkeypox cases (within 4 days)
- Laboratory workers who analyse specimens from monkeypox cases
- Sexually active HIV positive gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM MSM) (including cis and trans men)
  - With an STI in the last 12 months OR
  - Intending to engage in sexual practices that put them at higher risk of STIs during overseas travel to Europe or North America before 31 October OR
  - Who attend sex on premises venues
- Sexually active HIV negative GBM MSM (including cis and trans men)
  - With an STI in the last 12 months OR
  - Intending to engage in sexual practices that put them at higher risk of STIs during overseas travel to Europe or North America before 31 October OR
  - Who attend sex on premises venues
- Sexually active GBM MSM (including cis and trans men) who are homeless, or have significant drug use or psychiatric illness
- **Sex workers who engage in sex with GBM MSM.**

### Questions?

You can get in touch with RhED via email or phone;

[sexworker@sexworker.org.au](mailto:sexworker@sexworker.org.au)

OR

1800 458 752

You can stay up-to-date with MPXV information and case numbers through the following websites:

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/monkeypox>

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-alerts/monkeypox-mpx/about>