

MPOX



Monkeypox virus (MPOX) 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 MPOX?

MPOX 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 MPOX?

Sex workers are understandably concerned about MPOX 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. MPOX 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. MPOX rash could be itchy or painful.

How can transmission be prevented?

It is important if you have MPOX 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 MPOX. If conducting client health checks, look out for flu-like symptoms and a rash. If you are concerned a client might have MPOX 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 MPOX 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 MPOX 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 MPOX as skin lesions can be found anywhere on the body.

Vaccination

MPOX vaccines are now widely available in all Australian states.

Some Victorian clinics who participated in the initial vaccine rollout 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
- Barwon South West - phu@barwonhealth.org.au
- Gippsland/La Trobe - phu@lrh.com.au
- Goulburn Valley - phu@gvhealth.org.au
- Ballarat/Grampians - phu@bhs.org.au
- Loddon Mallee - phu@bendigohealth.org.au

Examples of MPOX lesions



Photo: UK Health Security Agency