

MPOX



Monkeypox virus (Mpox) information for Victorian sex workers

Mpox was Identified as a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance on July 26 2022 by Australia's Chief Medical Officer. Mpox cases remain persistent in some communities, and vaccines are available for free for eligible people (including sex workers).

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

In Victoria, the Mpox vaccine (JYNNEOS® vaccine) is available free-of-charge for eligible people. Information on where to access the vaccine can be found [here](#).

Eligibility criteria

Post-exposure preventative vaccination (PEPV) preferably in 4 days, in accordance with clinical guidance from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation for:

- High-risk contacts of Mpox cases
- Attendees of sex-on-premises venues and public or private events (particularly where sexual or intimate contact may occur) in areas where local transmission of Mpox is occurring.

Eligible people for primary preventative vaccination (PPV) include:

- Sexually active gay, bisexual or other men who have sex with men.
- Sexually active transgender and gender diverse people, if at risk of Mpox exposure.
- Sex workers, particularly those whose clients are at risk of Mpox exposure.
- Sexual partners (including anonymous or intimate contacts) of the above groups.
- Sex-on-premises venue staff and attendees.
- People living with HIV, if at risk of Mpox exposure, and their partners.
- Laboratory personnel working with orthopoxviruses.

Two doses of the vaccine are required for optimal protection and are provided subcutaneously 28 days apart. The mpox vaccine takes approximately 14 days before it is effective.

Examples of MPOX lesions



Photo: UK Health Security Agency