Q: What is monkeypox?
A: Monkeypox is a rare viral infection caused by a virus similar to smallpox. According to the CDC, despite being named “monkeypox,” the source of the disease remains unknown. However, African rodents and non-human primates — like monkeys — might harbor the virus and infect people. It was first detected in humans in 1970.

Q: How does monkeypox spread?
A: It is a viral “zoonotic” disease (one that can spread from animals to humans and between people). According to the CDC, the virus can spread from person-to-person through:

- Direct contact with the infectious rash, scabs or body fluids.
- Respiratory secretions during prolonged, face-to-face contact or during intimate physical contact.
- Touching items (such as clothing or linens) that previously touched the infectious rash or body fluids.
- Pregnant people can spread the virus to their fetus through the placenta.
- It’s also possible for people to get monkeypox from infected animals, either by being scratched or bitten by the animal or by eating meat or using products from an infected animal.

Q: Has Houston Methodist had any patients with monkeypox?
A: Yes, there are several dozen cases so far in the Houston area. If you have any questions, please contact Infection Control. For more information on confirmed cases in the U.S., please see the 2022 U.S. Map & Case Count | Monkeypox | Poxvirus | CDC.

Q: What are the symptoms?
A: Symptoms typically include a fever, intense headache, muscle aches, back pain, low energy, swollen lymph nodes and a skin rash or lesions. The rash is a prominent feature and usually begins within one to three days of the start of a fever. Lesions can be flat or slightly raised, filled with clear or yellowish fluid, and can then crust, dry up and fall off. The number of lesions on one person can range from a few to several thousand. The rash tends to be concentrated on the face, palms of the hands and soles of the feet. They can also be found on the mouth, genitals and eyes. In the current epidemic, some patients have had a rash present only in the genital area. According to the CDC, the rash goes through different stages before healing completely. The illness typically lasts two to four weeks. Sometimes, people get a rash first, followed by other symptoms. Others only experience a rash.

Q: What group of individuals is most at risk for contracting monkeypox?
A: So far, monkeypox is mainly affecting gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men. Although it is not considered a sexually transmitted disease, in a New England Journal of Medicine international case series, 98% of people with monkeypox were gay or bisexual, and the transmission was linked to sexual activity in 95% of the cases.

Q: What should I do if I think I have monkeypox symptoms?
A: If you think you have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with monkeypox, contact your health care provider for advice, testing and medical care. If possible, self-isolate and avoid close contact with others. Wash hands regularly and take the steps listed below to protect others from infection.
PATIENT MONKEYPOX FAQ

Q: When are people considered infectious with monkeypox?
A: People are considered infectious from the onset of symptoms and are presumed to remain infectious until lesions have crusted, those crusts have separated, and a fresh layer of healthy skin has formed underneath.

Q: How much should I worry about monkeypox?
A: Monkeypox is not yet a concern for most Americans because of the way that it is spread, unlike the highly-transmissible COVID-19 that is spread through microscopic aerosols.

Q: Can people die from monkeypox?
A: According to the CDC, infections with the type of monkeypox virus identified in this outbreak — the West African type — are rarely fatal. Over 99% of people who get this form of the disease are likely to survive. Newborns, children and people with underlying immune deficiencies may be at risk of more serious symptoms and death from monkeypox. In the prior epidemics, the reported death rate ranged from 1-11%.

Q: Who can catch monkeypox?
A: According to WHO, anyone who has close physical contact with someone who has symptoms of monkeypox, or with an infected animal are at risk of infection. People who were vaccinated against smallpox are likely to have some protection against monkeypox infection. However, younger people are unlikely to have been vaccinated against smallpox because smallpox vaccination stopped worldwide after smallpox became the first human disease to be eradicated in 1980. Even though people who have been vaccinated against smallpox may have some protection against monkeypox, they still need to take precautions to protect themselves and others.

Health care workers are also at higher risk due to potential longer virus exposure when dealing with infected patients.

Monkeypox should be suspected in people with fever, unexplained rash and:
1. Travel in the last 30 days to a country that has recently had confirmed or suspected case of monkeypox, or
2. Contact with a person with confirmed or suspected monkeypox, or
3. Intimate sexual contact

Q: How can I protect myself from monkeypox?
A: According to the CDC, there are a number of measures that can be taken to prevent infection with the monkeypox virus:
   • Avoid close, skin-to-skin contact with people who have a rash that looks like monkeypox.
   • Do not touch the rash or scabs of a person with monkeypox.
   • Do not kiss, hug, cuddle or have sex with someone with monkeypox.
   • Do not share eating utensils or cups with a person with monkeypox.
   • Do not handle or touch the bedding, towels, or clothing of a person with monkeypox.
   • Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Q: Is there a vaccine for monkeypox?
A: According to the CDC, two vaccines licensed by the FDA are available for preventing monkeypox infection – JYNNEOS and ACAM2000. In the U.S., there is a very limited supply of JYNNEOS, although more is expected in coming weeks and months.

There is an ample supply of ACAM2000. However, the CDC warns that this vaccine should not be used in people who have some health conditions, including a weakened immune system, skin conditions like atopic dermatitis/eczema or pregnancy.

No data are available yet on the effectiveness of these vaccines in the current outbreak.

People are considered fully vaccinated about two weeks after their second shot of JYNNEOS and four weeks after receiving ACAM2000. WHO is working with the manufacturer to improve access.

Monkeypox symptoms often resolve on their own without the need for treatment. Currently, there is no specific treatment approved for monkeypox virus infections. However, according to the CDC, antivirals developed for use in patients with smallpox may prove beneficial. Early vaccination of symptomatic individuals may also help prevent severe monkeypox disease, unlike with COVID where the vaccine needs to be given well before the infection.
Q: Should I get a small pox or monkeypox vaccine if I haven’t been exposed to monkeypox?
A: No. Mass vaccines are not necessary. The vaccine is extremely limited. The CDC and local health departments control who gets the vaccines based off contact tracing and risk level. The Houston Health Department is allowing two groups of high-risk people to get the monkeypox vaccine.

Q: Will Houston Methodist provide a vaccine for monkeypox?
A: Not for everyone. A vaccine may be given in consultation with infectious disease providers and CDC to exposed or infected persons on a case-by-case basis at this time.