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Monkeypox Cases Confirmed in the U.S.; Here's What You Should Know About the Viral Disease

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Mature, oval-shaped monkeypox virus particles shown through electron-microscope images. By. VIA REUTERS

The U.S., U.K. Portugal and Spain have reported dozens of confirmed or suspected cases of monkeypox, in what health authorities have deemed a perplexing outbreak of a disease rarely detected outside Africa.

In the U.S., the Massachusetts Department of Public Health said on Wednesday it was investigating a case of monkeypox in a man who recently traveled to Canada. On Friday, officials in New York said they were investigating a suspected case of the sometimes deadly disease. In Europe, health officials in Madrid were investigating 23 suspected cases of monkeypox.

Authorities in the U.K. have been following at least nine confirmed cases.

Jimmy Whitworth, professor of international public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, told the Wall Street Journal that the confirmed cases of monkeypox in Europe, Britain and the U.S. is "an unprecedented situation."

What is monkeypox?

According to [WSJ](#), monkeypox is a viral disease that circulates mostly among rodents in parts of West and Central Africa. The disease was first discovered in 1958 when two outbreaks of a pox-like disease occurred in research monkeys, hence its name.

The first case in humans was recorded in 1970, in a 9-year-old boy in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Most cases since have been reported from rural, rainforest regions of the Congo Basin, although it has been detected in several countries in West and Central Africa. Nigeria, for example, typically reports a few dozen cases a year, WSJ said.

What are the symptoms?

According to [Scientific American](#), monkeypox produces smallpox-like skin lesions, but symptoms are usually milder than those of smallpox. Flu-like symptoms are common initially, ranging from fever and headache to shortness of breath. One to 10 days later, a rash can appear on the extremities, head or torso that eventually turns into blisters filled with pus. Overall, symptoms usually last for two to four weeks, while skin lesions usually scab over in 14 to 21 days.

How does monkeypox spread?

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), transmission of monkeypox virus occurs when a person comes into contact with the virus from an animal, human, or materials contaminated with the virus. The virus enters the body through broken skin (even if not visible), respiratory tract, or the mucous membranes (eyes, nose, or mouth). Animal-to-human transmission may occur by bite or scratch, bush meat preparation, direct contact with body fluids or lesion material, or indirect contact with lesion material, such as through contaminated bedding. Human-to-human transmission is thought to occur primarily through large respiratory droplets. Respiratory droplets generally cannot travel more than a few feet, so prolonged face-to-face contact is required. Other human-to-human methods of transmission include direct contact with body fluids or lesion material, and indirect contact with lesion material, such as through contaminated clothing or linens.

Can contracting monkeypox lead to death?

While in most instances people who contract the disease recover in for 2-4 weeks, monkeypox can be deadly. According to the CDC, in Africa, monkeypox [has been shown to cause death](#) in as many as 1 in 10 persons who contract the disease.

How is monkeypox treated?

There is currently no proven, safe treatment for monkeypox virus infection, however vaccination against smallpox, which is closely related to monkeypox, has been shown to protect against the disease. According to the CDC, data from Africa suggests that the smallpox vaccine is at least 85 percent effective at preventing monkeypox. Vaccination soon after exposure might also help prevent the disease or make it less severe, according to WSJ.

Should America and its territories be worried about a monkeypox outbreak?

The CDC says U.S. monkeypox cases are very rare, and that it does not occur naturally in the United States but cases have happened that were associated with international travel or importing animals from areas where the disease is more common.

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