

Public health advice on mpox (monkeypox) and sex-on-premises venues and events

1 March 2023

This document contains public health advice for sex-on-premises venues and events to control the spread of mpox (monkeypox), while enabling venues to stay open and events to continue to take place. It contains practical advice on steps that can be taken to protect people from mpox. The advice in this document should be adapted to the local setting.

What we know about mpox is rapidly changing. This document contains the most up-to-date information from WHO on preventing and managing mpox, but this advice may evolve as we learn more.

Keep up-to-date at www.who.org.

Target audiences for this tool:

- Owners and managers of sex-on-premises venues
- Organisers of sex-on-premises events at hired or informal venues
- Staff and volunteers at venues and events
- Influencers, activists, community advocates and civil society organizations
- Individuals attending sex-on-premises venues or events
- Local and national public health authorities



Background:

Outbreaks of mpox are occurring in many countries globally. In many settings, cases are being identified in communities of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) who have had recent sexual contact with a new partner or multiple sexual partners. However, the risk is not limited to these groups.

Human to human spread of mpox can occur through close contact with someone who is infected, including through touching, kissing, oral, vaginal or anal sex. The virus can also spread through contact with contaminated environments via clothing, bedding, towels, objects (including sex toys), and surfaces.

Since the beginning of the most recent multi-country outbreak, clusters of mpox have been connected to sex-on-premises venues and events. Sex-on-premises venues can include saunas, sex clubs, bath houses, or businesses with back rooms and dark rooms; events refer to both private and commercial sex-on-premises events. Special considerations and precautionary measures are necessary for venues and events where there is sex on premises to reduce the risk of mpox for staff, people attending venues/events, and communities.

In the context of the current outbreak, mpox-associated risks should be considered and factored in when planning a gathering or event. Postponing or cancelling gatherings in areas where mpox cases have been detected is not required as a default measure.

Most sex-on-premises venues catering for gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men are familiar with providing an environment that supports attendees seeking safer sex in the context of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Mpox considerations can be readily included in the approaches in place to protect against HIV and STI transmission.

How to use this document:

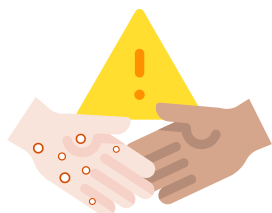
This document contains practical advice to help reduce the risk of mpox transmission in sex-on-premises venues and at sex-on-premises events. It is intended to be adapted to your specific needs and it can be used as a basis for community conversations, information sessions, or producing community information for your communities.

See the considerations for different stakeholders at the end of this document to support the use of this document by different actors.

Mpox - what you need to know:

An outbreak of mpox is occurring in many countries:

- Mpox is preventable — most people recover fully but some people can get seriously ill, particularly those who are immunosuppressed such as those with untreated or HIV/AIDS.
- Symptoms can be uncomfortable and painful.
- What we know about the outbreak is changing fast; we are learning more every day.



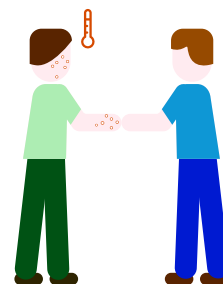
Symptoms for mpox often include:

- Rash on face, hands, feet, body, perianal area or genitals
- Rash in mouth, throat, eyes, vagina, anus
- Fever
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Headaches
- Muscles and back aches
- Low energy
- Painful swelling inside your rectum (proctitis)
- Pain or difficulty when urinating



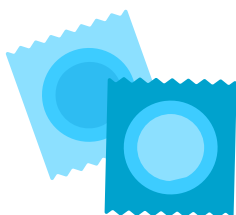
Mpox can be contracted through close contact with someone who is infected including:

- Skin-to-skin (e.g., touching, anal and vaginal sex)
- Face-to-face (e.g., talking, breathing)
- Mouth-to-skin (e.g., oral sex, rimming)
- Mouth-to-mouth (e.g., kissing)
- From contaminated bedding, towels, clothing, surfaces and objects



Mpox can spread through sex (how to reduce harm):

- People who have sex with multiple or new partners are most at risk.
- Condoms prevent some STIs. They will not prevent infection through close physical contact. They may however reduce exposure to mpox, and the severity of anal symptoms if infected.
- Condom use is recommended for three months after recovery from mpox because sexual transmission of the virus is still not fully understood.



How people can protect themselves and others:

- Keep having conversations with peers, and sexual partners, about mpox, and stay up-to-date with the latest information.
- Know the symptoms.
- Avoid close contact with someone who has mpox and encourage people with mpox to isolate where possible.
- Have accessible health advice and adequate testing services for people who have been exposed or have symptoms.
- Get vaccinated when available and appropriate — vaccination can reduce but not eliminate your risk.
- Check yourself regularly for symptoms and ask sexual partners to do the same.
- If mpox is impacting your community, you can reduce your risk by reducing your number of sexual partners; waiting for a while before having sex with any new partners; or taking a break from sex.
- Have open, non-judgemental conversations. Swap contact details with sexual partners and agree to let each other know if you develop symptoms.



Activities to reduce the risk of mpox at sex-on-premises venues and events:

A “risk-based approach” is a helpful framework to use when planning how to keep your venue safe. It involves three steps for consideration:



1. Risk evaluation:

identifying the baseline risks associated with the realities of your venue or event and the context in which it takes place



2. Risk mitigation:

using the information in this document and from local health authorities to reduce the risk of mpox for staff, people attending venues/events and communities



3. Risk communication:

getting accurate, timely and appropriate information to the people at risk

Be open and transparent with all the relevant stakeholders when planning your event and encourage their involvement from the beginning. This helps ensure that public health advice and concerns are identified early, shared, and included in your risk assessment and decision-making process for the event.

Planning

- Identify trusted sources of information about the risk of mpox in your area (e.g., your local health authority, the Ministry of Health or WHO).
- Identify focal points responsible for managing mpox risk.
- Develop a plan for how to support cases of mpox that may occur during or after your event including providing details of relevant health services.
- Consider putting in place a system of paid sick leave for staff/volunteers who have confirmed/suspected mpox or who are a close contact.
- Consider putting in place a system for ticket refunds for people who are unable to attend because of confirmed or suspected mpox symptoms or recent exposure.



Communications for events and at venues¹

Before an event:

- Inform staff and volunteers about how to protect themselves and others against mpox, the symptoms and what to do if someone at an event or venue develops symptoms.
- Run awareness raising sessions for staff and volunteers on how to avoid stigmatising or discriminatory behaviour, and how to manage stigma and discrimination from people attending the venue or event.²
- Communicate with people attending the event in advance using contact lists, messaging groups, social media, venue/event websites etc., to raise awareness of the risk of mpox, how to identify symptoms, the importance of testing and isolation for anyone who has symptoms and how to have open and non-judgmental conversations with other close contacts. Ask anyone with symptoms to get tested and not to attend the venue/event if they are positive.
- If relevant for your context or community, explore the potential vaccination options for users and staff at sex-on-premises venues and events.
- Identify where clients can be referred for mpox testing or vaccination
- Have a refund policy in place and encourage people who develop mpox symptoms or people who are close contacts to skip the event and be reimbursed for their tickets.



¹ Hereafter referred to as “event”.

² For more information [see our public health advice on understanding preventing and addressing stigma and discrimination related to mpox.](#)

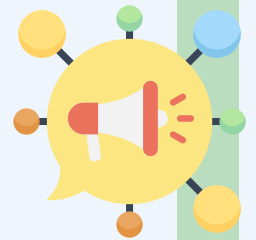
At your venue or during an event:

- Use posters inside your venue raising awareness of symptoms and ways to reduce the risk of picking up or passing on mpox.
- Provide information to people attending the venue/event on what to do if they develop symptoms during or after the event.
- Share local information on how to get tested.
- Share local information for eligible groups on how to get vaccinated against mpox, if it is available.
- Encourage open, non-judgmental conversations between sexual contacts on potential exposures and for people to exchange contact details if they feel comfortable and if it is safe to do so.
- Communicate in a transparent way about any contact tracing measures in place around the event with respect to confidentiality.
- Encourage attendees to:
 - » Contact event organisers in case they develop mpox symptoms after the event.
 - » Leave their contact details at the reception if they wish to be contacted in the future if there are cases of mpox reported among persons who were in the same venue/event on the same day.



After an event:

- Use mailing lists and communications channels (like phone messaging groups and social media pages) to encourage people who are close contacts or symptomatic to connect with their local public health authority and get tested.
- Follow up with your communities and your event attendees to share the latest information and help support surveillance and contact tracing.
- Use mailing lists/social media to remind people who have attended events/venues to check themselves for symptoms for up to three weeks after the event, and to inform the venue/event organisers and any close sexual contacts if they develop symptoms during this period.
- If it becomes known that there was a definite mpox exposure, communicate with attendees/visitors and share local information on how to get health advice and tested if necessary.
- Share local information for high-risk groups on how to get vaccinated against mpox, if it is available.



Contact tracing

Contact tracing is an essential public health tool for controlling infectious disease outbreaks as it can help break chains of transmission through the rapid identification of contacts, and isolation and clinical care of cases.

- Help implement systems to support contact listing and follow-up, and notification of mpox exposure through the established communications channels in your community (including through email lists, messaging groups and social media). Try and deliver clear information through trusted channels.
- Encourage reporting of mpox and/or communication among close contacts of people infected with the virus
- If appropriate, ask event organisers or venue staff to create attendance lists to share information about reporting and health support services to your community.
- Where a known exposure has occurred in an event or venue but individual tracing of contacts is not feasible, established communication channels (as above) can be used to notify exposed individuals of their exposure, the appropriate measures to take to avoid onward transmission, and how to seek care if symptoms develop.



Infection prevention and control

- Make sure frequently touched surfaces and objects are cleaned with water and soap, and disinfected regularly (with standard disinfectant). When possible, do this during your event.
- Regularly wash clothes, towels, linen or equipment with standard detergents and hot water (above 60 °C).
- Ensure staff undertaking cleaning and waste disposal are wearing a well-fitted surgical mask, non-sterile disposable gloves, and a disposable apron.
- Ensure that waste products such as tissues, condoms and paper towels are double bagged and disposed of using standard waste management.
- Have condoms available throughout your facility or across your event.



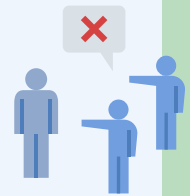
Avoiding and addressing stigma and discrimination

Stigma harms people diagnosed with mpox, but also affects their communities, their partners and their close contacts. Even people who have recovered from mpox are at risk from stigma and discrimination.

Reduce the risk of stigma and discrimination related to your event by:

- Respect and protect the privacy and confidentiality of people attending or working at the venue/ event, especially people who develop mpox
- Train staff working at your venue or event on mpox, stigma and discrimination to ensure they know how to support public health measures aimed at protecting your communities
- Support community organizations working on the ground to deliver public health messages and interventions such as vaccines, so that people attending your venue can manage their risk
- Avoid using language, photographs or graphics that spread fear or place an emphasis on a particular group, activity or community
- Use accurate language to describe how this virus is being transmitted: people 'acquire' or 'contract' mpox through close contact
- Reiterate that stigma and discrimination harm people and make outbreaks harder to control

For more information see [our public health advice](#) on **understanding preventing and addressing stigma and discrimination related to mpox**.



Considerations for different stakeholders:

Different stakeholders have different roles to play, here are some considerations for those actors when using this public health advice.

1. Owners and venue managers (permanent venues) including saunas and sex clubs:

- Communicate what the expectations and services (e.g. paid sick leave) are for staff/volunteers who have confirmed/suspected symptoms or who are close contacts of someone with mpox symptoms.
- Train your staff. Recruit local health care providers to come and share information about common symptoms and the health care services available.
- If appropriate (i.e. you are at high risk of exposure to mpox) and available, consider vaccination for you and your staff and encourage those applicable to seek vaccination.³



³ For more information read WHO's Interim guidance for vaccines and immunization for mpox: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-MPX-Immunization>.

2. Owners of venues and spaces that host or hold sex-on premises events:

- Make a plan with the organisers of the event to be held in your venue including how to communicate information about mpox and following up with people after the event in case there is an outbreak.
- As above, if appropriate and possible, consider vaccination for you and your staff and encourage those applicable to seek vaccination.



3. Event organisers that promote and organise sex-on-premises events

- If you manage attendees at your event you can assist with post-event surveillance for mpox and follow up with attendees for a health check and testing for mpox and other STIs.
- Work with venue owners, promoters, and community influencers to develop a process to support cases of mpox through providing information about health care and testing and encouraging notification of close contacts.
- Ensure information is available on safe behaviours for attendees including through flyers, information to accompany tickets, the event website and posters in the event space.
- Consider partnering with sexual health clinics or service provider organizations to facilitate referrals for testing for HIV, STIs, and other infections at sex-on-premises events.



4. People attending sex-on-premises venues or events, including events run informally with friends and communities

- Keep up to date about the risk of mpox in your area and community. Check yourself regularly for symptoms. If you are living with HIV, take your medication regularly. This will help reduce your risk of severe mpox if you contract the infection.
- If you have new and unusual rashes or sores, you should avoid attending events and having sex or any other kind of close contact with other people until you have been checked for STIs and mpox.
- If possible, avoid close contact with persons who have confirmed or suspected mpox. . If you think you may be at risk of acquiring mpox through sexual contact, you may choose to reduce the number of new sexual partners you have. Additionally, you may choose to have sex only with people that you stay in contact with, in case any of you develops symptoms. Remember that the rash can also be found in places that can be hard or impossible to see inside the body, including the mouth, throat, genitals, vagina, anus or rectum, and people may have this infection without knowing. Wearing a condom won't fully protect you from catching mpox, but it will help protect you and others from a range of other STIs.
- If you think you have mpox, have open, non-judgmental conversations with the people you come into close contact with at the event.
- If you have symptoms, seek health advice on getting tested for mpox as well as other STIs before going to an event or sex-on-premises venue. If you don't know your HIV status, be sure to also ask for an HIV test.
- If you are at risk of exposure to mpox get vaccinated if it is available to you in your context.



Extra resources

- For more detailed community specific information, see our [public health advice](#) for gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men and public health advice for sex workers.
- For more information, see [our public health advice](#) on understanding preventing and addressing stigma and discrimination related to mpox.
- **Public health advice for gatherings during the current mpox outbreak:** <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-MPX-Gatherings-2022.1>.