CareQuest Institute for Oral Health®

Monkeypox and the Role of Oral Health Providers

in the Virus's Detection and Prevention

MPX (also known as mpox or monkeypox) is a contact-transmissible virus that was declared a public health emergency by the United States and World Health Organization (WHO) in summer 2022. Symptoms are usually similar to, but milder than, those of smallpox, and the virus is most commonly transmitted through close contact between individuals.[1] Oral health providers may be some of the first health care professionals to detect signs and symptoms of MPX in their patients and can play a key role in helping reduce the spread of this virus.

The most common symptom of MPX is a rash that may be painful or itchy and appear on the face, hands, feet, chest, and around the genitals or anus. Individuals with MPX may also experience fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, swollen lymph nodes, and fatigue.[2]

The illness associated with the virus usually lasts 2–4 weeks. Individuals with MPX are typically able to transmit the virus starting when they first experience symptoms and until the rash has healed and all scabs have fallen off.[2]

Two-day-old lesion appearing on the gingival papilla of an individual who tested positive for MPX slightly more than 24 hours after this photo was taken. Image used with permission of Bradley Shepard, D.D.S.

Approximately
7 out of 10
cases of MPX involve **lesions in the mouth,** which may appear before lesions on other areas of the body.[3]

Individuals with MPX may also experience a sore throat, swollen tonsils, and difficulty swallowing.[4] Oral health providers, then, play an important role in screening patients for MPX symptoms and providing education and guidance about the virus.[5]

Using infection control precautions similar to those implemented during the COVID-19 public health emergency, **oral health providers may wish to screen patients prior to dental appointments for symptoms of MPX** and may opt to postpone elective treatments until patients with MPX are no longer infectious. During dental treatment, following **"standard, contact, and droplet infection control precautions" is advised** for oral health providers.[6]

Most adults are comfortable receiving health screenings from their oral health providers.

More than 4 out of 5 adults say they are comfortable receiving an oral cancer screening from their dentist,

and 7 out of 10 are comfortable being screened for COVID-19 by an oral health provider.[7]

Screening for the oral lesions associated with MPX is similar to other oral examinations done in a dental office and is likely to be similarly acceptable to dental patients.

Two vaccines currently exist for the prevention of MPX.[8] Access to dental care is linked to increased vaccination rates for other viruses. For example, adolescents who have regular dental visits are more likely to be vaccinated against human papillomavirus (HPV), a virus that causes cancers of the mouth and throat.[9]

About half (49%) of oral health providers either offer COVID-19 vaccines or are interested in providing such vaccines.[10] Of adults who are willing to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, more than half (60%) are comfortable receiving such a vaccine from an oral health provider.[11] Oral health providers could play an important role in educating patients about MPX vaccines and providing appropriate referrals.

Oral health providers are in a key position to screen for, detect, and educate patients about MPX and, in turn, help reduce the transmission and spread of this virus.[12]

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