

# The Role of Oral Health Providers in Screening and Referrals for Mpox (Monkeypox) 2024 Update

Mpox (also known as MPX or monkeypox) is a contact-transmissible virus that was declared a public health emergency by the United States and the World Health Organization (WHO) in summer 2022. The WHO again declared mpox a public health emergency in August 2024 with a resurgence in cases, particularly — but not exclusively — in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since December 2023, the US has been monitoring the spread of mpox and preparing for a possible increase in cases domestically.

Symptoms are usually similar to, but milder than, those of smallpox, and the virus is most commonly transmitted through close contact between individuals. Oral health providers may be some of the first health care professionals to detect signs and symptoms of mpox in their patients and can play a key role in helping reduce the spread of this virus.

**The most common symptom of mpox is a rash that may be painful or itchy** and appear on the face, hands, feet, and chest, and around the genitals or anus. Individuals with mpox may also experience fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, swollen lymph nodes, fatigue, and respiratory symptoms such as nasal congestion, cough, or sore throat.



**The illness associated with the virus usually lasts two to four weeks.** Individuals with mpox 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.



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

**Mpox lesions may first appear in the mouth or on the tongue before they appear elsewhere on the body.**

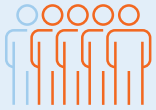


Individuals with mpox may also experience a sore throat, swollen tonsils, and difficulty swallowing. Oral health providers, then, play an important role in screening patients for mpox symptoms and providing education and guidance about the virus.



Oral health providers should monitor and be aware of increases in mpox cases in their communities. If cases increase, 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 mpox** and may opt to postpone elective treatments until patients with mpox are no longer infectious. During dental treatment, following **“standard, contact, and droplet infection control precautions” is advised** for oral health providers.

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,<sup>1</sup>



and **half** of adults are comfortable being screened for COVID-19 by an oral health provider.<sup>2</sup>

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



**Currently, a two-dose vaccine exists for the prevention of mpox.** 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.

About half (49%) of oral health providers either offer COVID-19 vaccines or are interested in providing such vaccines. 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. Oral health providers could play an important role in educating patients about mpox vaccines and providing appropriate referrals.



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

1. Unpublished data, 2024 State of Oral Health Equity in America Survey, CareQuest Institute for Oral Health.
2. Unpublished data, 2024 State of Oral Health Equity in America Survey, CareQuest Institute for Oral Health.

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