

Preparation for and Guidance on Monkeypox as Fall 2022 Semester Begins

News of an emerging infectious disease following nearly three years of COVID-19 may, understandably, be cause for concern. It is critical that [the information we provide](#) to our students, faculty and staff is current and accurate, allowing people to be able to make the best decisions for their health and the health of our community.

Current Information on Monkeypox

Since [monkeypox](#) was [declared a public health emergency by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), UNM administrators and health experts have been closely monitoring this developing situation at both the state and local levels. Although monkeypox continues to spread throughout the United States, with [close to 12,000 reported cases nationwide and 16 reported cases in New Mexico to date](#), the current risk to the public remains low.

Current information indicates that the monkeypox virus spreads through close, sustained physical contact with an infected person, which can include sexual contact. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) recommends](#) avoiding close, skin-to-skin contact with people who have a rash that looks like monkeypox, avoiding contact with objects and materials a person with monkeypox has used, like clothing, towels or bedding, and practicing good health hygiene. As with COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, transmission can be mitigated by frequent handwashing, staying home if you are not feeling well and contacting your health provider if you have symptoms.

For the most up-to-date medical information, please [refer to the CDC website](#), which provides information about the signs, symptoms and treatment of the virus. The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) has also posted [information about monkeypox](#), including symptoms and what to do if you think you have been exposed or have the virus.

Monkeypox Infection or Exposure

If you are exposed to monkeypox or have symptoms, please stay home. Students concerned about infection or exposure should contact [UNM Student Health and Counseling \(SHAC\)](#) or their health care provider to schedule an appointment. Faculty and staff who are symptomatic or have been exposed should contact their health care provider for testing. If you test positive for monkeypox, follow guidance from your health care provider and refer to [CDC isolation and prevention practices](#). The NMDOH is managing contact tracing, risk determinations of exposures (outside of the hospitals) and outpatient post-exposure treatments.

Vaccination Against and Treatments for Monkeypox

While there are effective vaccines against monkeypox, [the CDC recommends vaccination](#) for people who have been exposed to monkeypox or are more likely to get it, and in New Mexico vaccines are only available for moderate and high-risk exposures, as determined by the NMDOH. If you think you are at risk and are interested in a vaccine, please call the N.M. Department of Health (NMDOH) Call Center at 1-855-600-3453, Option 4, for a confidential consultation. If you are eligible, NMDOH will register you over the phone and you will be invited to schedule for vaccines as soon as they become available.

There are no treatments specifically for monkeypox virus infections. However, monkeypox and smallpox viruses are genetically similar, which means that antiviral drugs and vaccines developed to protect against smallpox may be used to prevent and treat monkeypox virus infections.

Protect Yourself, Protect the Pack

As we prepare for the start of the fall semester, let's continue to protect our own health – both physical and mental – and that of our pack. A word on misinformation and stigma surrounding monkeypox: this virus is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI), nor is it isolated to certain communities. As a welcoming, inclusive and compassionate place of learning, stigmatizing words or actions related to the monkeypox virus – or any other illness – have no place at UNM.

UNM will continue to work closely with public health partners, and we are prepared to adapt to future guidance as needed. We will keep the Lobo community informed as any updates become available.