

Public health advice for people recovering from or caring for someone with mpox at home in low-resource settings

Overview

Mpox is a viral infection that can cause symptoms such as a painful rash, fever, headache, muscle ache, back pain, low energy, and swollen glands (lymph nodes). Most people fully recover from mpox; however, it can lead to severe illness among certain people. Children, pregnant individuals, and people with weakened immune systems, especially people living with uncontrolled HIV, are at greater risk of serious complications or death from mpox.

People at high risk of complications should seek professional health care and monitoring in a hospital or other health-care setting. However, most people with mpox will recover at home. For people recovering at home, safe and supported home isolation and proper care are essential to prevent the spread of the virus and to support full recovery.

This advice provides practical guidance based on current knowledge of mpox transmission and infection prevention and control measures for various environments. It is intended to support a timely and effective response to mpox outbreaks, especially in low-resource settings.

The document draws on the guidance published by WHO: [Infection prevention and control and water, sanitation and hygiene measures during home care and isolation for mpox in resource-limited settings: interim operational guidance](#). It recognizes that many people with mpox living in low-resource settings may have severely inadequate and insecure housing, often in contexts of overcrowding and poor sanitation, which increases the risk of exposure to infectious diseases and stress. Inadequate water supply and sanitation facilities affect food safety and personal hygiene. They also affect people's ability to manage privacy and confidentiality. All of these create additional challenges during a mpox outbreak.

This advice may evolve as more evidence becomes available. Keep updated at www.who.int.

Who this document is for

This document provides essential public health advice for people recovering from mpox at home and for those caring for someone with mpox in low-resource settings.

It is intended for:

- people with mpox who need guidance on safe home care and self-isolation;
- caregivers, family, and household members supporting someone with mpox;
- community health workers and healthcare providers offering advice and support for home care; and
- public health personnel and community leaders or organizations promoting community health.

The information included here should be adapted to fit local contexts, considering specific needs and risks within each home setting.



1. Isolating and caring for someone safely at home

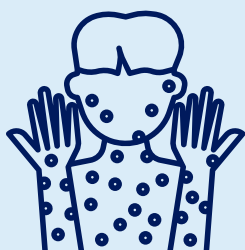


If you suspect you have mpox, you should take immediate steps to prevent the infection from spreading to other people with whom you may come in close physical contact, especially household members. If you think you may have come in contact with someone with mpox or have mpox symptoms, communicate with a health-care provider as soon as possible. Health-care providers can provide advice on how to recover safely at home while reducing the risk that other people in your home also become infected.

If a health-care provider advises you to isolate and recover at home, keep in touch with them and seek immediate advice if your rash becomes more painful, shows signs of being infected (such as fever, redness or pus), if your fever, nausea or vomiting get worse, if you are unable to eat or drink, if you have difficulty breathing or if you feel dizzy or confused.

Certain individuals – children, pregnant people, immunocompromised individuals, and people with chronic skin conditions – usually need care in a health-care facility. A health-care provider should carefully assess these individuals to determine whether home care is safe.

If you have already fully recovered from mpox, consider supporting other people in your community who may be newly infected. Having had mpox likely gives you some protection against getting it again or having severe symptoms, but this protection is not complete. For this reason, you should still take precautions when caring for someone with mpox.



2. Recovering safely from mpox at home



If you think you may have been in contact with someone with mpox or you have mpox symptoms, contact a health-care worker and isolate yourself if advised. You should make the decision to isolate at home instead of in a health-care facility with a health-care provider.

This includes evaluating your mpox symptoms and your risk for more severe illness; Are you or another household member pregnant? Do you have a condition that weakens your immune system such as untreated or uncontrolled HIV infection, cancer or taking immunosuppressive medication? If you, your child, or another household member has these risk factors, then a health-care provider may decide to admit you to a health-care facility or treatment centre.

If you and a health-care provider decide that home isolation is possible, you may be visited by a health-care provider or community health volunteer to discuss the support you need to manage isolation at home. This person will bring supplies, such as personal protective equipment, with them for their visit. If they do not have the necessary supplies to enter the home, they may ask you or your caregiver to meet them outside the home. Always maintain at least 1 metre distance from the health-care provider or community health volunteer during the visit. Isolation is required until all skin lesions have healed, all scabs have fallen off and a fresh layer of skin has formed underneath.

By following this advice, individuals with mpox and those around them can help prevent the virus from spreading while promoting safe recovery at home.



3. Important facts about mpox



- **Symptoms and onset:** mpox symptoms usually appear between 3 and 21 days (3 weeks) after close contact with someone with mpox. Common symptoms include painful rash, fever, headache, muscle ache, back pain, low energy, and swollen glands (lymph nodes).
- **Rash and affected areas:** the mpox rash can appear on the face, palms of the hands, soles of the feet, groin, genital and anal regions and sometimes in the mouth, throat, or eyes. The number of sores can range from one to several thousand.
- **Potential complications:** mpox can lead to severe pain, infections of the skin or lungs, eye problems and inflammation around the genitals or rectum. Additional risks include loss of pregnancy, scarring, blindness or, in rare cases, death – especially for infants, young children or people with a weakened immune system.
- **Transmission:** mpox mainly spreads through close contact with someone who has mpox, including skin to skin (such as touch or sexual contact), mouth to mouth or mouth to skin (such as kissing) and face to face (such as talking or breathing for an extended period of time close to someone who has mpox). The virus can also spread through surfaces touched by someone with mpox, such as eating utensils or bed linen if not properly handled and cleaned.
- **Infectious period:** people with mpox can transmit it to other people until all rash lesions have healed and a new layer of skin has formed. This can take several weeks.



4. Taking care of yourself at home



When isolating at home with mpox, self-care is essential for recovery and for monitoring any signs that symptoms are worsening.

- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of safe fluids, eat nutritious food and get enough sleep. Use safe water for drinking, cooking, and hygiene. If a service provider does not treat the drinking-water, heat the water until a rolling boil, keep boiling it for 1 minute and cool before using. Use a clean container for storage with a narrow opening and a cover.
- If needed, use medication for reducing fever (antipyretics) and for relieving pain (analgesics) as advised by a health-care provider.
- Contact a health-care provider right away if your rash becomes more painful, shows signs of being infected (such as fever, redness or pus), if your fever, nausea or vomiting get worse, if you are unable to eat or drink, if you have difficulty breathing or if you feel dizzy or confused. Support from your family and friends is important; ask them to bring you water, nutritious food, and medicine. If you have any questions or concerns, reach out to a health-care provider.

4.1 Taking care of your rash

- Do not scratch lesions or shave any areas with a rash or lesion until it fully heals.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer before and after touching any lesions.
- Keep your rash dry and uncovered to support healing – only cover your lesions when you are around other people. Lesions may be covered by using clothing (such as a long-sleeve shirt or pants) or gauze bandages.
- Keep your rash clean with sterilized water or antiseptic and then let it air dry.
- Rinse lesions in your mouth with salt water.

4.2 Taking care of your mental health

Dealing with mpox can be stressful. Feeling low is normal, so take steps to support your mental health.

- Do activities you enjoy and find relaxing.
- Stay connected with other people as much as possible (such as by phone) while avoiding direct contact.
- If you feel well enough, exercise or go outside briefly. Wear a medical mask and cover your lesions if you are within 1 metre of other people.
- If you need support, reach out to a health-care provider.
- Remember, having mpox is nothing to be ashamed of. Anyone can get mpox.

5. Protecting other people if you are isolating at home



Whenever possible, you should take care of yourself, clean your environment, or space in the household and handle your laundry to avoid spreading infection to other household members.

To prevent spreading mpox to other household members, follow these precautions.

- If possible, stay in a separate room. If a separate room is not available, identify an area within a shared room by using a screen or curtain to create space and distance from other people.
- Try to keep at least 1 metre from other people and avoid physical contact.
- Clean your hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based handrub, especially before eating, after using the toilet, after cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and toilets, after washing laundry, after handling waste or after removing gloves and medical masks. Do not share soap or towels with other household members.
- When close to other people, wear a well-fitting medical mask. If you do not have a medical mask, use a fabric mask. Also, cover any visible lesions.
- Avoid using communal toilets and showers. If communal toilets or showers must be used, clean the area after use by cleaning the toilet or latrine with soapy water and then wipe or rinse it with household bleach (0.05% or 500 ppm), ensuring that it is wet for 1 minute after each use. Clean the shower after each use in the same manner.
- Do not share a bed or sleeping area with other people. Use a separate mattress or, if unavailable, set up a distinct sleeping area.
- Try to avoid sitting on shared household furnishings. If you must use furnishings, cover them with a sheet or blanket before using them.
- Do not share your linen, towels or eating utensils with other people. Keep them separate from other people by using a bin or bucket for storage.

- Wash linen, towels, and clothing separately from the household laundry with detergent and warm or hot water for at least 20 minutes. If detergent is not available, launder items in warm water and household bleach (0.05% or 500 ppm).
- Remain at home unless undertaking essential activities outside, such as health-care appointments, work if necessary and getting food or medicine. If you leave the isolation area, wear a well-fitting medical mask (if not available, use a fabric mask), cover your lesions and avoid close contact with other people and sharing any personal items.
- Dispose of waste (such as bandages, medical masks, and gloves) safely, placing it in a sealed strong bag.
- Say no to visitors, unless they can communicate from a safe distance, such as through a window or several metres away in a yard.
- Mpox can spread between humans and animals, so avoid all contact with animals.



6. Caring for someone with mpox at home



If you are caring for someone with mpox, follow this advice to protect yourself and other people while supporting their recovery.

- Caregivers should be in good health, ideally vaccinated against mpox or having previously recovered from it. Pregnant people and people in vulnerable groups should avoid caregiving.
- Ideally, only one person should provide care to limit exposure.
- If you are the caregiver, stay at least 1 metre from the person with mpox. If this is not possible, wear a well-fitting medical mask (or, if not available, a fabric mask) and disposable gloves (or household utility gloves). If gloves or masks are not available, wear clothing dedicated for use around the person with mpox and clean and wash these items after each use.
- As a caregiver, check on the person with mpox regularly to ensure that their condition is stable or improving and that the person is drinking fluids regularly and eating nutritious food. Use safe water for drinking, cooking, and hygiene.
- If needed, use medication for reducing fever (antipyretics) and for relieving pain (analgesics) as advised by a health-care provider.
- Contact a health-care provider immediately if symptoms become worse. Look for signs of:
 - » more painful or infected rash (redness or swelling);
 - » persistent or worsening fever, nausea or vomiting or inability to eat or drink; and
 - » difficulty breathing, dizziness, or confusion.
- Explain preventive measures to other household members and tell visitors when they may and should not enter the home.
- Avoid touching the utensils, surfaces, or linen of the person with mpox and clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based handrub before and after contact with the person with mpox or touching the areas or utensils the person used.
- Section 4 provides advice on how to safely manage a mpox rash.

Laundry, cleaning, and waste disposal for the person with mpox

Taking care of laundry, cleaning and waste disposal requires careful handling to reduce the spread of mpox. When you handle laundry or waste or clean and disinfect toilets, showers, and surfaces, wear a well-fitting medical mask (or, if not available, fabric mask) and disposable gloves (or household utility gloves).

- Do not shake linens or bedding. Roll items carefully and wash them separately from other household laundry.
- Wash linen, towels, and clothing separately from the household laundry with detergent and warm or hot water for at least 20 minutes. If detergent is not available, launder items in warm water and household bleach (0.05% or 500 ppm).
- Clean surfaces in the area where the person with mpox is staying at least daily with soapy water and then disinfect using cloths soaked in household bleach (0.05% or 500 ppm), allowing surfaces to remain wet with the bleach solution for at least 1 minute.
- Clean areas after the person with mpox uses them. Clean the toilet or latrine with soapy water and then wipe or rinse it with household bleach (0.05% or 500 ppm), ensuring that it is wet for 1 minute after each use. Clean the shower after each use in the same manner.
- Avoid sweeping. Damp mop floors with household bleach (0.05% or 500 ppm).
- Dispose of waste safely. Put waste (such as bandages, medical masks, and gloves) in a sealed strong bag. If centralized waste collection is unavailable, burn the waste away from people and animals or bury it immediately. Always clean your hands after handling the waste.

As a caregiver, you should also take care of yourself

- Watch for any mpox symptoms and contact a health-care provider if they appear.
- Clean your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based handrub.
- Contact a health-care provider if you have questions or need support.

Respect and stigma

- Caring for or knowing someone with mpox can be challenging, so respect each other's rights and dignity.
- If someone tells you that they have mpox, be supportive, not judgemental. Respect their privacy and support their choices about telling other people.
- If possible, help with daily tasks and assist the people in isolation with errands and check on them regularly. Most people recover fully within two to four weeks.
- Giving people an opportunity to talk about their concerns and feelings can also help. Encourage them to take care of themselves.
- Stigma and discrimination related to any disease are never acceptable. Stigma can prevent people from seeking help and can undermine public health efforts or prolong a disease outbreak. Treating other people with respect promotes public health and encourages people to get the care they need.

