

Information

for County Councillors

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Relevant SLT Director and sign-off date:	Professor Trudi Grant, Director of Public Health 2 nd August 2022
Date:	2 nd August 2022
To:	All Elected Members

Monkeypox Update

Background

Monkeypox is a rare infectious disease, usually associated with travel to west and central Africa. However, since May 2022 there has been an unusual number of cases increasing globally, and in the UK, although the overall risk to the UK population remains low. Monkeypox is a viral infection and is not spread easily between people, but it can be spread person to person including through touching monkeypox skin blisters or scabs during sex. More information on transmission and symptoms can be found at [Monkeypox - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/monkeypox/). Monkeypox usually causes a mild illness that resolves without treatment and most people recover within a few weeks. However, severe illness can occur in some people, in particular young children, pregnant women and those with impaired immunity. The time between exposure to the disease and the onset of symptoms (incubation period) is long which does make controlling its spread more challenging.

Anyone can get monkeypox but currently the outbreak in the UK has mainly been in gay, bisexual, and men who have sex with men (GBMSM) without documented history of travel to endemic countries. As of the 28th July there were 2,436 confirmed or highly probable cases in England, with the majority of cases in London (1,778) and the South East (204). The South West has had 47 cases most of which were sporadic and there are no outbreaks currently associated with the region. [Monkeypox outbreak: epidemiological overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/monkeypox-outbreak-epidemiological-overview). Recent data indicates that the number of cases in the UK is slowing down. To date there have been no identified cases in Somerset. In July 2022 the WHO declared monkeypox as a disease

of International Public Health Concern, as unlike the UK, cases have continued to rise globally. Cases of monkeypox are notified to UKHSA who undertake contact tracing, to help limit onward spread and to provide support. Contact management involves self-monitoring of symptoms for those contacts classed as high or medium risk and post exposure vaccination is offered to those who are eligible. [Monkeypox contact tracing guidance: classification of contacts and advice for vaccination and follow-up \(25 July 2022\) \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#). Contacts are advised to report any symptoms that develop within 21 days after their last contact with a monkeypox case through NHS 111 or a sexual health clinic for clinical advice and assessment.

Vaccination

The national vaccine strategy in response to the UK monkeypox outbreak proposes that pre-exposure vaccination is offered to GBMSM identified as at highest risk due to a large number of sexual contacts. [Monkeypox outbreak: vaccination strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). These are to be identified from those who attend sexual health services, using markers of high-risk behaviour similar to those used to assess eligibility for HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), but applied regardless of HIV status. The risk criteria includes a recent history of multiple partners or a bacterial sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the past year. NHS Somerset is leading the vaccination programme for Somerset, with Somerset Foundation Trust managing delivery. Nationally, vaccine supply is limited and has been prioritised for London where the vast majority of cases have been identified. NHS England have given reassurance that there will be sufficient vaccines available to vaccinate all those who are eligible and to roll out the programme across the South West as quickly as possible.

Somerset has received an initial small supply of vaccines and these are being managed through the Somerset Wide Integrated Sexual Health Service (SWISH) and The Starling Clinic (HIV treatment service). SWISH is inviting men who have been identified as a priority to receive the vaccination and as vaccine supply increases in the coming weeks this will be extended to others who meet the criteria; people are being advised to wait until they are invited for vaccination and to then come forward at the earliest opportunity. Any impact on SWISH, which is commissioned by Somerset County Council, is being closely monitored and will be mitigated through provision at The Tower vaccination centre if numbers required were to escalate beyond those planned for. The Tower currently provides post-exposure vaccination for eligible close contacts.

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