



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

Ashwin Vasani, MD, PhD  
*Commissioner*

July 18, 2022

Dear Colleague,

The monkeypox outbreak is accelerating in New York City (NYC). As of July 18, 2022, 681 people in NYC have tested positive for orthopoxvirus, presumed to be monkeypox, and there are likely many more undiagnosed cases.<sup>1</sup> The risk of exposure for gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) that have multiple or anonymous sex partners is likely high.<sup>1</sup> We expect to see infections in non-MSM social networks and among people with a range of gender identities.

I am writing to ask for your urgent assistance in evaluating and testing patients seeking care for possible monkeypox. Although most people in the current outbreak have recovered without hospitalization or treatment,<sup>2,3</sup> lesions from monkeypox can be extremely painful and cause scarring, making palliative care an essential part of care.

Many of you have been providing care for patients presenting with monkeypox symptoms; however, we have heard concerning reports of patients being turned away by providers. Delays in diagnosis and care result in needless suffering and increases in community spread. It also perpetuates stigma and inequities, with potential catastrophic impacts on mental health and care-seeking behavior. This could set us back decades in the fight to ensure that people of all sexual orientations and gender identities receive dignified care. As clinicians, it is incumbent on us to make sure that does not happen, including by being prepared to evaluate patients with monkeypox symptoms while providing a welcoming and [affirming care](#) environment.

We recognize the hardships attendant to caring for patients with a new disease that is time-consuming to diagnose. Please see the recent [Health Advisory](#) and the NYC [monkeypox provider webpage](#), which has information and resources on diagnosis, testing, care and treatment, and infection control. Implement protocols for supporting frontline providers in the diagnosis and management of monkeypox. Remind staff to assess the need for and offer appropriate pain management options to all patients; research indicates that Black, Latino and other patients of color are less likely to receive sufficient pain management compared to White patients.<sup>4,5</sup>

Please check the [monkeypox provider webpage](#) for updates, as the situation is rapidly evolving. Providers can also call the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Provider Access Line (866-692-3641) for assistance evaluating cases. Information and resources for patients are available at [nyc.gov/health/monkeypox](https://nyc.gov/health/monkeypox).

I am confident that together we can ensure that all New Yorkers get the compassionate care they deserve. Thank you for your steadfast commitment to protecting the health of New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Ashwin Vasani, MD, PhD  
Commissioner

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

## References

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