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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 23, 2022

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Bay Area Health Officials Urge Awareness About Monkeypox as Summer Travel and Gatherings Begin

This is a joint statement from Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Mateo, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Sonoma counties and the City of Berkeley

ALAMEDA COUNTY, CA – As the summer season begins with increased travel and major events and gatherings, Bay Area Health Officials urge people to protect themselves against the monkeypox virus, which spreads through prolonged skin-to-skin contact and bodily fluids, such as through crowded settings or sexual contact.

The alert from nine health jurisdictions comes as cases – which appear on individuals as distinctive rashes and sores that can look like blisters or pimples – continue to emerge in the Bay Area, the nation and the globe. Monkeypox is not new, but this is the first time this virus has spread in so many countries at once.

Most cases of monkeypox resolve on their own, although it can be serious. The illness often begins with flu-like symptoms before the emergence of a rash and may last for 2 to 4 weeks. A post-exposure vaccination is available through healthcare providers.

Unlike COVID-19 which spreads easily through the air, the risk of monkeypox to the general public is currently low unless they engage in higher-risk behaviors. Having sex with multiple sex partners can increase a person’s risk of becoming infected when monkeypox is spreading in the community. Be aware of crowded, indoor spaces where people have close skin-to-skin contact, sex, kissing, and close breathing. The virus can also be spread through shared clothing or bedding.

“People are ready to fully experience this summer’s festivities, and they can do so safely by taking precautions that keep themselves and those around them healthy,” said Dr. Kavita Trivedi, Alameda County Communicable Disease Controller. “We know how to contain the spread of monkeypox and we’re asking everyone to be aware of the signs of infection. If they are experiencing symptoms, they should stay home and contact their health care provider right away.”

Many of the cases currently appearing are within networks of self-identified gay and bisexual men, trans people, and men who have sex with men. People in these networks are currently at higher risk, though people of any sexual orientation or gender identity can become infected and spread monkeypox. Public awareness is important as the disease could spread within potentially larger groups or networks of people.

Bay Area Health Officials urge the media, government officials, and the community at-large to avoid stigmatizing a particular group or person for monkeypox, but rather support those at highest risk and keep others from becoming complacent.

There are other contagious illnesses that can cause rash or skin lesions. For example, syphilis and herpes are much more common than monkeypox, can look similar, and should be treated too.

How to protect yourself:

- Consider covering exposed skin in dense, indoor crowds
- Don't share bedding or clothing with others when possible
- Before having close, physical contact with others, talk to your partners about their health and any recent rashes or sores
- Stay aware if traveling to countries where there are outbreaks

How to protect others:

If you have symptoms particularly a rash consistent with monkeypox, or if you have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with monkeypox:

- Stay home if you are feeling sick
- Contact a health care provider as soon as possible for an evaluation
- Avoid skin-to-skin, or close contact with others, including sexual contact, until a medical evaluation has been completed
- Inform sex partners about any symptoms you are experiencing
- Cover the rash with clean, dry, loose-fitting clothing
- Wear a well-fitted mask
- If you are contacted by public health officials, answer their confidential questions to help protect others who may have been exposed

How to get help:

Alameda County has three confirmed cases of monkeypox to date. Officials are ready to coordinate testing, conduct contact tracing, discuss treatment options, and offer vaccine to close contacts as more cases are investigated. If you are experiencing symptoms consistent with monkeypox, please contact your health care provider or be evaluated at the nearest Emergency Department.

More information about monkeypox can be found here:

- **Alameda County guidance for the public:** <https://acphd.org/programs-and-services/monkeypox/>
- **Testing information and guidance for Alameda County health care providers:** <https://acphd.org/communicable-disease/monkeypox/>
- **Q&A from CDPH:** cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Monkeypox-Questions-and-Answers.aspx
- **Information on monkeypox from the CDC:** cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/response/2022/index.html
- **Social gatherings and safer sex from the CDC:** cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/specific-settings/social-gatherings.html

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Alameda County, located in the eastern San Francisco Bay Area, is the seventh (7th) most populous county in the State of California. With a total area of more than 800 square miles and a population of more than 1.6 million residents, Alameda County encompasses urban, suburban, and rural geographic areas as well as a large unincorporated area. Alameda County is characterized by its rich ethnic diversity and is ranked as one of the most diverse counties in the country. Based on the 2018 American Community Survey, 32.1 percent of the County's population is foreign-born and there is no majority racial or ethnic group. In addition, according to the California Department of Education, 60 languages were spoken by English language learners in the K-12 public school systems in Alameda County in 2019-2020.