



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

# **Australia's health system can learn from sexual health experts in responding to monkeypox**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

With Australia's monkeypox cases up to seven, our health system can learn from the sexual health experts currently at the front line of the response.

Monkeypox is a rare zoonotic viral infection that has seen a recent rise in cases in Europe and North America. Seven cases have been confirmed in Australia over the past three weeks. The virus is understood to have a relatively low transmission rate, and transmission occurs primarily via close contact with an infected person.

Based on early reports, many cases in Australia have been identified through sexual health services, or by GPs with expertise in sexual health. Monkeypox is not a sexually transmissible infection (STI) but can present with similar symptoms to some STIs.

ASHM Vice-President and infectious diseases physician A/Prof James McMahon said it was important for clinicians to be able to distinguish potential cases of monkeypox from other STIs and other illness causing rash and fever.

"Many of the cases seen in Australia and overseas have had atypical presentations, such as a milder illness or absence of fever, and presenting initially with rash around the genitals rather than all over the body. Possible cases need to be carefully assessed, particularly when symptoms present similarly to STIs," he said.

A/Prof McMahon also said that Australia's entire health system, not just sexual health services, should be ready to respond to the current outbreak.

"All healthcare providers should be alert for the possibility of monkeypox and they can learn from sexual health experts on ways to help identify cases."

ASHM CEO Alexis Apostolellis stressed the need for health services to provide care in a supportive, non-stigmatising manner.

"We have so far seen a concentration of monkeypox cases among men who have sex with men, but it is important to stress that this disease can affect anyone. We have learned from the past four decades of the HIV response the potential for disease responses to stigmatise affected and vulnerable populations," he said.

Apostolellis also said that as an organisation representing sexual health clinicians and other healthcare workers, ASHM is advising government on the monkeypox response, including promoting and implementing forthcoming national clinical guidelines and a clinical case definition.

“The detection, treatment, management, and prevention of monkeypox is a quickly evolving space, and we are already rolling out education and information to a wide spectrum of healthcare workers across Australia.”

ASHM has already delivered education to over 800 healthcare workers in response to the monkeypox outbreak, and is developing a toolkit of resources for use by clinicians as part of the [Series of National Guidelines \(SoNGs\)](#). ASHM also coordinates and publishes the [Australian STI Management Guidelines](#), which are currently being updated to include these new resources given its current presentation in sexual health contexts.

**ENDS**

**ASHM is a peak organisation of health professionals in Australia and New Zealand who work in HIV, viral hepatitis, other BBVs and sexual health. For more information on ASHM’s work, including policy engagement, education and resources, visit: [ashm.org.au](http://ashm.org.au)**

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