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Media Contact: Jose Arballo Jr
RUHS-Public Health
Office: 951-358-5599 Cell: 951-712-3705
Email: jarballojr@ruhealth.org

Riverside County health officials proclaim a public health emergency as number of Monkeypox cases grows

Riverside County Public Health Officer Geoffrey Leung has proclaimed a Public Health Emergency due to the growing number of Monkeypox cases, a move that health officials say will focus attention on a virus that has spread so quickly.

Leung signed the proclamation today (8/8/22). The Board of Supervisors has seven days to ratify the action. Both state and federal health officials, as well as a handful of counties and cities in California, have proclaimed Monkeypox a public health emergency

“We have seen the devastating physical effects of Monkeypox on those who have been infected, as well as the emotional toll on partners, family and loved ones,” said Leung. “Now is the time for Public Health, our community partners and local leadership to reinforce our commitment to work together to slow and eventually stop the spread of this virus.”

Public Health officials have reported 59 probable/confirmed monkeypox cases in Riverside County. There have been a handful of patients who have been briefly hospitalized, but no deaths reported from the virus in Riverside County.

Officials hope the proclamation will show the community that Public Health views Monkeypox as a threat to all county residents. Leung said the move could help as local officials lobby for additional vaccine, which has been in limited supply.

Monkeypox spreads primarily through direct contact with infectious sores, scabs, or body fluids, including during sex, as well as activities like kissing, hugging, massaging, and cuddling. Monkeypox can spread through touching materials used by a person with monkeypox that haven't been cleaned, such as clothing and bedding. It can also spread by respiratory secretions during prolonged, close, face-to-face contact.

Vaccination helps to protect against monkeypox when given before or shortly after an exposure. At this time, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has allocated a limited number of JYNNEOS vaccine doses to Riverside County. JYNNEOS is licensed for adults 18 years and over. It is administered as a two dose injection series in the upper arm at least four weeks apart.

Riverside County is also working with community partners to provide Tecovirimat (TPOXX) for infected patients who are at higher risk of severe disease from monkeypox. At this time, most patients have not required TPOXX and symptoms have resolved on their own with symptom management strategies.

There are number of ways to prevent the spread of monkeypox, including:

- Always talking to your sexual partner/s about any recent illness and being aware of new or unexplained sores or rashes on your body or your partner's body, including on the genitals and anus
- Avoiding close contact, including sex, with people with symptoms like sores or rashes
- Practicing good hand hygiene
- Using appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) (like a mask, gown, and gloves) when caring for others with symptoms
- Avoiding contact with infected materials contaminated with the virus
- People who become infected should isolate until their symptoms are improving or have gone away completely. Rash should always be well covered until completely healed.