

# About Monkeypox

Monkeypox is a rare disease that is caused by infection with monkeypox virus. Monkeypox virus belongs to the *Orthopoxvirus* genus in the family *Poxviridae*. The *Orthopoxvirus* genus also includes variola virus (the cause of smallpox), vaccinia virus (used in the smallpox vaccine), and cowpox virus.

Monkeypox was first discovered in 1958 when two outbreaks of a pox-like disease occurred in colonies of monkeys kept for research, hence the name 'monkeypox.' The first human case of monkeypox was recorded in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo during a period of intensified effort to eliminate smallpox. Since then, monkeypox has been reported in humans in other central and western African countries. Human monkeypox infections have only been documented six times outside of Africa; in the United States in 2003 (47 cases), in both the United Kingdom (3 cases) and Israel (1 case) in 2018, in Singapore in 2019 (1 case) and in both the United Kingdom (3 cases) and the United States (1 case) in 2021.

The natural reservoir of monkeypox remains unknown. However, African rodent species are suspected to play a role in transmission.

There are two distinct genetic groups (clades) of monkeypox virus—Central African and West African. Human infections with the Central African monkeypox virus clade are typically more severe compared to those with the West African virus clade and have a higher mortality. Person-to-person spread is well-documented for Central African monkeypox virus and limited with West African monkeypox.



Child affected with monkeypox.

## Cases of Monkeypox Since 1970

Country	Year	Recorded Human Cases*
Cameroon	1979	2
Cameroon	1989	4
Cameroon	2018	1
Central African Republic	1984	6
Central African Republic	2001	4
Central African Republic	2010	2
Central African Republic	2015	12
Central African Republic	2016	11
Central African Republic	2017	8
Central African Republic	2018	14
Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)	1971	1
Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)	1981	1
Democratic Republic of Congo	1970-present	>1000/year †
Gabon	1987	5
Israel	2018	1 §

Country	Year	Recorded Human Cases*
Liberia	1970	4
Liberia	2017	2
Nigeria	1971	2
Nigeria	1978	1
Nigeria	2017-present	446 ¶
Republic of Congo	2003	11
Republic of Congo	2009	2
Republic of Congo	2017	88
Sierra Leone	1970	1
Sierra Leone	2014	1
Sierra Leone	2017	1
Singapore	2019	1
Sudan	2005	19**
United Kingdom	2018	3††
United Kingdom	2021	3
<a href="#">United States</a>	2003	47§§
United States	2021	1***

\* Includes laboratory-confirmed cases and suspected cases that had an epidemiologic (close contact), spatial, or temporal link to a laboratory-confirmed case

† DRC has reported >1,000 suspected cases each year since 2005

§ Introduction attributed to an imported case in a traveler who visited Nigeria.

¶ Current as of July 2021. See [Nigerian Centre for Disease Control](#) for the most up to date information

\*\* Introduction attributed to movement of the virus from Democratic Republic of the Congo. Cases occurred in an area that is now part of South Sudan

†† Introduction attributed to two unrelated imported cases among travelers who visited Nigeria.

§§ Introduction attributed to a shipment of animals imported from Ghana.

\*\*\* Patient tested positive for monkeypox after returning to the U.S. from Nigeria.