Can monkeypox be a sexually transmitted infection?

Dear Editor,

Human monkeypox (MPX) is a zoonotic disease caused by the monkeypox virus (MPXV). The first confirmed human case, a 9-month-old boy, who had direct contact with monkeys, was reported in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. MPXV is endemic in several Central and West African countries.[1]

Seventy-four thousand eight hundred and forty-eight laboratory-confirmed cases have been reported from May 13 to October 21, 2022, in 28 nonendemic countries in four of the World Health Organization regions.[2] The current nonendemic outbreak involved persons who have not mostly traveled to endemic areas. The issue suggests human-to-human transmission of the virus. In reported cases, there are some evidence to support the hypothesis that MPX could be a sexually transmitted disease.[1]

First, most of these cases are men, in particular men who have sex with men, men with multiple sexual partners, or who have condomless sex. The appearance of skin lesions which can resemble herpes and syphilis leads to most of these men seeking care in sexual health clinics and sexual transmitted diseases clinics in the current outbreak. The lesions were mostly located and initially appeared in genital and perianal areas, which increase the probability of sexual transmission.[3-5]

Second, MPXV DNA was found in samples from semen of several cases at the closest time to symptom onset. However, we know that other viruses which do not transmit sexually can be found in semen during viremia.[3,6]

Third, in the current published articles, most of the confirmed cases had a history of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The issue could suggest a potential role of HIV coinfection.[3,4]

Sexual behavior in most reported cases, the role of close contact during sexual intercourse in virus transmission, initial appearance of skin lesions in genital regions, detection of MPXV in semen, and coinfection of other STIs in several cases can suggest the possibility of sexual transmission of MPXV, but it needs to have further investigation.

Declaration of patient consent

The authors certify that they have obtained all appropriate patient consent forms. In the form the patient(s) has/have given his/her/their consent for his/her/their images and other clinical information to be reported in the journal. The patients understand that their names and initials will not be published and due efforts will be made to conceal their identity, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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