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Four monkeypox cases confirmed in Wisconsin

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(CNN) -- Health officials in Wisconsin have confirmed four cases of monkeypox in the Milwaukee area in what is believed to be the first outbreak of the disease among humans in the Western Hemisphere.

Another 18 people in Milwaukee are suspected of having the disease, said Raquel Madrid-Berkel, a spokeswoman for the city's health department, and doctors are monitoring other possible cases in Illinois and Indiana.

Monkeypox occurs primarily in Central and West Africa and is similar to but less infectious than smallpox. Symptoms include a fever, headache, chills and a rash.

"At this point, there is no vaccine for monkeypox," Madrid-Berkel said. "[Suspected cases are] being monitored on a daily basis, and they're requested to be isolated in their home."

No human deaths have been reported from the disease, which authorities said they suspect was passed to humans by prairie dogs sold by a Milwaukee pet distributor. Most patients had direct or close contact with ill prairie dogs, health officials said.

Infection is typically fatal in 1 percent to 10 percent of cases in humans, said Dr. James Hughes, director of the National Center for Infectious Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC said Sunday the Milwaukee cases would be the first known infection of humans with the virus in the Western Hemisphere.

Limited person-to-person spread has been observed in Africa, Hughes said Sunday, but



KAP PHOTO/FILE

Prairie dogs kept as pets may be spreading an illness in the Midwest, the CDC warns.

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MONKEYPOX

- The disease is usually found in remote villages in Central and West Africa.
- Monkeypox is related to the virus that causes smallpox. There is no vaccine, but smallpox vaccinations may give protection against monkeypox.
- The death rate among those with monkeypox ranges from 1 percent to 10 percent, with the highest rates among young children.
- The disease is usually transmitted to people from squirrels and primates through a bite or contact with the animal's blood.

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it is difficult to track because those areas are remote and medically underserved.

According to the CDC, the pet distributor got the animals from an Illinois distributor who had kept the prairie dogs in a container with a Gambian rat, another popular rodent pet. Health officials said they suspect the rat was the source of the infection because tests have shown Gambian rats have antibodies to monkeypox.

Close contact with prairie dogs or Gambian rats could put people at risk, Hughes said.

"It's very important that a physician, veterinarians and the public should be aware of this very unusual outbreak and be on the lookout for symptoms," he said. "The public, if they experience illness in themselves or family members, should report this promptly to their physicians."

Monkeypox, first recognized in 1971, has been shown to be susceptible to Cidofovir, an antiviral agent used to treat smallpox, said Dr. Peter Jahrling, a scientific adviser for the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases.

Sources: [The Associated Press/World Health Organization](#)

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