# The Facts about Monkeypox





A message from your veterinarian and the New Jersey Veterinary Medical Association. For more pet care information, visit www.njvma.org

## What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is a rare viral disease that occurs mainly in the rain forest countries of central and west Africa. In June 2003, monkeypox was reported in prairie dogs and humans in the United States. It is caused by the *Monkeypox virus*, which belongs to the orthopoxvirus group of viruses, which causes smallpox and cowpox.

### What should I do if I think my pet has monkeypox?

Pet owners who suspect their animal may have monkeypox should immediately isolate the animal from humans and other animals and contact their veterinarian. Owners should notify the veterinarian before transporting the animal to the hospital so that appropriate infection control precautions can be implemented prior to arrival. The types of animals that may become ill with monkeypox are currently unknown. Animals housed with ill prairie dogs or Gambian giant rats may be at risk.

# How do I know if I have monkeypox?

The incubation period for monkeypox is approximately 12 days. The illness begins with fever, headache, muscle aches, backache, swollen lymph nodes, a general feeling of discomfort, and exhaustion. Patient later develop a rash, often first on the face but sometimes initially on other parts of the body.

# How do people get monkeypox?

Monkeypox can spread to humans from an infected animal through a bite or direct contact with the animal's lesions or body fluids. The virus also can be spread from person to person through respiratory droplets and possibly by direct contact with body fluids of an infected person or with virus-contaminated objects, such as bedding or clothing.

### Is there a treatment or vaccine for monkeypox?

Currently, there is no proven, safe treatment for monkeypox, although Smallpox vaccine has been reported to reduce the risk of monkeypox. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that persons involved in caring for infected individuals or animals or those who have had close or intimate contact with individuals or animals confirmed to have monkeypox should be vaccinated.

# How was monkeypox introduced in the United States?

One hypothesis is that the prairie dogs contracted the virus from infected Gambian giant rats, which were housed in the same animal-holding facility or pet shop as the prairie dogs. The Gambian giant rats were likely imported into the United States from Africa. Studies have shown that Gambian rats and other rodents in Africa have evidence of monkeypox virus infection.

# What should someone do if they think they have been exposed to monkeypox?

Persons who think they may have been exposed to a person or an animal (e.g., pet prairie dogs) with monkeypox should contact their health care provider and their state or local health department.

According to the NJ Division of Environmental Protection Agency, Division of Fish & Wildlife regulations, it is illegal to own prairie dogs as pets, or for pet shops to sell prairie dogs in New Jersey.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control web site at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/monkeypox or the New Jersey Department of Health web site at www.state.nj.us/health for current information about the outbreak.