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County Executive

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Commissioner, Department of Health

ATTENTION

Public Health Update

The Westchester County Department of Health provides public health updates to members of the medical community on important issues affecting public health in Westchester

11 June 2003 - Alert: Monkeypox in Humans from Prairie Dogs & Rabbits

Please distribute to Emergency Department, Internists, Infectious Diseases, Pediatricians, Dermatologists, Family Practitioners, Infection Control Staff, and Laboratory Directors

- Physicians are being alerted to consider monkeypox in persons with contact with prairie dogs, rabbits, or Gambian giant rats within 3 weeks of developing fever, cough, headache, myalgias, rash or lymphadenopathy.
- Patients suspected of having monkeypox, as with any patients with a febrile rash illness, should be identified and placed in an isolation room with appropriate infection control measures as soon as possible
- Suspected human cases of monkeypox should be immediately reported to the Westchester County Department of Health:

914-813-5159 - Monday-Friday 8:30-4:30 914-813-5000 After hours and weekends

Dear Colleagues,

State and local health departments have been notified of at least 50 suspected cases of monkeypox virus infection in U.S. residents since May 15. All identified cases to date have had contact with an ill prairie dog or rabbit in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, including the case under investigation in New Jersey. An investigation of the source of the virus and these sick animals is ongoing and it is not currently known whether any prairie dogs or other animals in New York or Westchester County may have had contact with any of the sick animals distributed or sold in the Midwest. This is the first identified community acquired monkeypox virus infection in the U.S.

Physicians are thus being alerted to consider monkeypox virus infection in the differential of individuals who have had contact with recently acquired animals and compatible clinical findings and to report such cases to the Westchester County Department of Health (WCDH). Relevant information and recommendations about this monkeypox virus outbreak have been communicated to New York State, including Westchester County veterinarians by the NY State Veterinary Medical Society and to pet dealers by the NY State Department of Agriculture & Markets and WCDH. Reporting of animals suspected to have monkeypox virus infection to WCDH has been requested; WCDH will arrange for testing of such animals and notify NYS Agriculture & Markets to perform tracebacks of sick animals.

Monkeypox Illness in Humans

Monkeypox infects squirrels, rats, mice, rabbits, and monkeys, and appears to be transmitted to humans through a bite or direct contact with animals that are ill with monkeypox virus infection. There is no evidence of person to person transmission in any of the U.S. cases although person to person transmission has been reported previously. Monkeypox is much less infectious than smallpox (secondary attack rate of less than 10%). Monkeypox is an orthopoxvirus (related to the virus which causes smallpox and the vaccinia virus

contained in the vaccine against smallpox) and causes signs and symptoms similar to these and other orthopoxvirus diseases. The rash has been described as initially papular, progressing to vesiculation, pustulation, and crusting and is found simultaneously in different stages involving the face, head, trunk, and extremities. The incubation period is approximately 12 days and is characterized by a rash that develops 1-3 days after a prodromal period of fever, headache, myalgias, backache, malaise and lymphadenopathy. Illness typically lasts 2-4 weeks. In Africa, the case fatality rate from monkeypox has ranged from 1-10%.

Current outbreak - As of June 10, a total of 50 persons with suspected monkeypox has been reported in Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana, with laboratory confirmation for four of these individuals. A child who moved from Indiana last week but now lives in New Jersey has been reported as a possible case – the child had contact with a sick prairie dog in Indiana. Seven of these individuals were hospitalized; none of the patients has died. The prodromal period of a non-specific febrile illness was followed by a nonproductive cough in some patients, with development 1-10 days later of a papular rash that typically progressed through stages of vesiculation, pustulation, umbilication, and crusting. In some patients, early lesions were also ulcerated.

Treatment - There is no specific treatment for monkeypox. Smallpox vaccine has been reported to reduce the risk of monkeypox among previously vaccinated persons in Africa and the potential role of smallpox vaccine in persons who have been exposed to monkeypox is currently being assessed. In addition, antiviral drugs, such as cidofovir, are being evaluated for the treatment of monkeypox.

Infection Control: General Precautions

A combination of Standard, Contact, and Airborne Precautions should be applied for any patient who presents with fever and rash.

These include (see <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ISOLAT/Isolat.htm>):

- Placement in an airborne isolation room with negative pressure relative to the surrounding area. If a negative pressure room is not available, place the patient in a private room.
- Hand hygiene after all contact with an infected patient and/or the environment of care.
- Use of gown and gloves for any contact with the patient and/or the environment of care.
- Eye protection (e.g. goggles or face shield) if splash or spray of body fluids is likely.
- Respiratory protection including an N-95 mask should be worn when entering the room for patient care. If an N-95 mask is not available, then surgical masks should be worn.
- Ensure that procedures are in place for cleaning and disinfecting environmental surfaces in the patient care environment. Any EPA-registered hospital detergent-disinfectant currently used by health-care facilities for environmental sanitation may be used.
- In the out-patient setting, the patient should be segregated from others in the reception area as soon as possible, preferably in a private room with negative pressure relative to the surrounding area. Place a surgical mask over the patient's nose and mouth. Care should be taken to cover exposed skin lesions to prevent contact with potentially infectious material.

Further information can be found at the websites of the CDC: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/monkeypox, the New York State Department of Health: <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/zoonoses/zoonoses.htm> or the Westchester County Department of Health: www.westchestergov.com/health

The Westchester County Health Department thanks the medical and laboratory communities for their continued collaboration in the investigation of communicable diseases.