



## Response to Recent Monkeypox Outbreaks

According to the CDC, in the summer of 2003, health officials and scientists investigated several reports of monkeypox among individuals who became ill after having contact with sick captive prairie dogs. Investigators determined that a shipment of animals from Ghana were imported to Texas in April 2003 and introduced monkeypox virus to captive prairie dogs in the United States. In total, 47 persons became ill with monkeypox during this time. The disease is caused by the monkeypox virus, which belongs to the orthopoxvirus group of viruses. The prairie dogs in the pet trade acquired the monkeypox virus following contact with these infected rodents that were imported as exotic pets. These prairie dogs were sold as pets before they developed signs of infection. This was the first time that human monkeypox cases were reported outside of Africa.

As we see monkeypox cases in the United States start to emerge again in 2022, it is central to clarify that none of these recent cases have been linked to prairie dogs. Importantly, there are no monkeypox outbreaks or infections in wild populations of prairie dogs, nor has the virus ever been detected in wild populations. **Wild prairie dogs are not vectors for this disease and do not pose a risk of transferring monkeypox to humans.**

## Talking Points for Agencies and Organizations

### Key Messages

- Wild prairie dogs pose no risk of transferring monkeypox to humans
- Monkeypox does not exist in wild prairie dog populations
- In 2003, pet prairie dogs were exposed to imported rodents from Ghana that were infected with monkeypox. These exposed prairie dogs became infected and were sold before showing symptoms. All of the humans that contracted monkeypox were connected to this isolated pet trade outbreak. This incident called for the CDC to pose restrictions on the importation of African rodents, which remains in place today.

July 2022

- The cases of Monkeypox in the United States in 2021 and 2022 have been confirmed to be travel related and in no way linked to prairie dogs, according to the CDC.

### **2003 Outbreak**

- In 2003, monkeypox was introduced to the United States through the shipment of animals for the exotic pet trade.
- The shipment to Texas from Ghana included 800 animals, and CDC laboratory testing showed that two African giant pouched rats, nine dormice, and three rope squirrels were infected with monkeypox virus.
- These imported, infected mammals from Africa were housed near prairie dogs that were also captive for pet trade at an animal vendor in Illinois
- The prairie dogs became infected, and were sold before they began showing symptoms.
- All people infected with monkeypox became ill after having contact with infected pet prairie dogs. No instances of monkeypox infection were attributed exclusively to person-to-person contact.
- Enacted in June 2003, CDC's restriction on the importation of African rodents remains in place today, and there have been no further outbreaks linked to prairie dogs.

### **2021 and 2022 Monkeypox Cases**

- The cases of Monkeypox in the United States in 2021 and 2022 have been confirmed to be travel related and in no way linked to prairie dogs, according to the CDC.

### **Impact to Wild Prairie Dogs**

- Prairie dogs continue to be persecuted at alarming rates across the United States. In fact, their numbers have decreased by over 95% across all five species in the past 150 years.
- Monkeypox does not exist in wild populations of prairie dogs, and therefore do not pose a risk of spreading monkeypox to humans.

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/outbreak/us-outbreaks.html>

<https://academic.oup.com/jid/article/194/6/773/864712?login=false>

[https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/13/9/07-0175\\_article](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/13/9/07-0175_article)