Monkeypox Precautions in the Workplace

As the Centers for Disease Control has lessened restrictions for COVID-19, monkeypox has emerged as the newest public health emergency, but what does that mean for employers? Employers should be educated on monkeypox, like all communicable diseases, to provide a safe workplace. Here are some key things to know about the virus:

Differences Between Monkeypox and COVID-19
- Monkeypox is not currently known as a threat to communities or workplaces.
- Vaccines already exist and medical experts are familiar with the virus. Therefore, it is not considered a "novel" virus. COVID-19 is considered a "novel" virus because it is the first of its kind with many unknowns about prevention, diagnosis, treatment, cures, and lasting effects.
- Monkeypox is not an airborne disease and is not spread as easily as COVID-19. It is only transferred by direct contact.

Transmission
- The virus spreads with close, personal, or intimate contact, usually skin-to-skin contact.
- It can be transmitted by utensils shared and bedding or towels with monkeypox secretions.
- Transmission occurs within a two- to three-week period between when the rash appears and when it is scabbed over.

Symptoms
- Typically monkeypox appears as a rash that looks like pimples and can be itchy or painful as well as blistering. There are several stages before the rash begins healing.
- Symptoms usually start within 3 weeks of exposure. The rash typically develops within one to four days after experiencing flu-like symptoms.
- Each person may experience different symptoms; some may experience only one and some may experience several.

Prevention
- Good hand washing, hygiene, and social distancing protocols.
- Avoid close contact and intimacy with anyone experiencing symptoms or diagnosed with monkeypox.
- Properly clean and disinfect laundry and surfaces.
- Vaccination, when it does not compromise religious beliefs or medical advice.

Employer Actions
- Employees reporting symptoms should remain home until the rash is completely gone.
- Employees reporting close contact with monkeypox should be sent for medical treatment immediately.
- Report cases to the local health department.
- Contact tracing is only necessary for situations where employees work near each other, are prone to skin-to-skin contact, or share clothing such as uniforms, safety equipment, etc.
- Educate employees about the virus and be cautious of conversations stigmatizing the virus or individuals infected with it.

Additional information about the monkeypox virus is provided by the CDC, and the World Health Organization (WHO), or members may contact the 24/7 HR Hotline at 866-HR-Hotline (866)474.6854 or InfoNow@mranet.org.