

Mumps

This is an illness due to infection with the mumps virus. Mumps occurs most commonly in children and adolescents, though symptoms are more severe in adults. Approximately 30% of cases will have only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.

When present, symptoms include:

- > swelling of the glands on the sides of the face and along the jaw line. Swelling and tenderness starts just below and in front of one or both ears (colour plate no. 13)
- > fever
- > headache
- > inflammation of the testicles (orchitis) occurs in 20% of adult males
- > inflammation of the ovaries (oophoritis) occurs in about 5% of adult females.

Despite popular opinion, sterility following infection is rare. Another rare complication is inflammation of the brain (encephalitis), though meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) from mumps is probably more common and may be accompanied by hearing loss.

The diagnosis is suspected following clinical examination and can be confirmed by a blood test. Mumps virus may also be grown in the laboratory from throat swabs, fluid specimens taken from the nose, cerebrospinal fluid (fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord) or urine.

Mumps is spread directly by mucous membrane (lining of the nose and mouth) contact with airborne droplets from the nose and throat. It may be spread indirectly by contact with hands, tissues and other articles soiled by nose and throat discharges. The disease is also spread by direct contact with the saliva of an infected person.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Generally 14 – 25 days, usually 18 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Up to 6 days before swelling of the glands begins and up to 9 days after the onset of swelling. Asymptomatic infections can still result in spread of infection. Exposed non-immune people should be considered infectious from the 12th to the 25th day after exposure whether or not they have symptoms.

Treatment

Treatment of the symptoms includes giving plenty of fluids. Paracetamol may be given for fever and pain. There is no specific antiviral treatment.

Control of spread

- > The person should be excluded from school or work for nine days after the onset of symptoms, or until swelling goes down (whichever is sooner).
- > Tissues and other objects soiled with nasal secretions should be disposed of appropriately.
- > Mumps is best prevented by the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) combination vaccine. Two doses of MMR are recommended: one at 12 months and the second at four years of age. This provides optimal long-term protection.
- > Immunisation after exposure will not prevent infection in contacts, though it will provide immunity in the event of future exposures.



Mumps is a notifiable disease

- > Immunisation