

Mumps

Mumps is a contagious viral infection that occurs mainly in school-aged children. Immunisation with a mumps containing vaccine prevents the disease. People with mumps should stay away from others for nine days after the onset of swelling of the salivary glands.

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What is mumps?

Mumps is an infectious disease caused by the mumps virus. In the past, mumps infection was very common in childhood. Due to immunisation, it has become uncommon in Australia.

What are the symptoms?

- Common symptoms of mumps are fever, loss of appetite, tiredness and headaches followed by swelling and tenderness of the salivary glands. One or both of the parotid salivary glands (which are located within the cheeks, near the jaw line, below the ears) are most frequently affected.
- About one third of infected people do not show any symptoms at all.
- Mumps is usually a more severe illness in people infected after puberty.
- Complications from the mumps are uncommon and can include inflammation of the brain (encephalitis), the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis), the testicles (orchitis), the ovaries (oophoritis), breasts (mastitis), spontaneous abortion and hearing loss. Sterility (inability to have children) in males is extremely rare.

How is it spread?

- Mumps is spread when a person breathes in the mumps virus that has been coughed or sneezed into the air by an infectious person. The mumps virus can also spread from person to person via direct contact with infected saliva.
- People with mumps can be infectious up to seven days before and nine days after swelling of the salivary glands begins. Maximum infectiousness occurs between 2 days before to 4 days after the onset of symptoms.
- The time from being exposed to the virus and becoming sick can range from 12 to 25 days but is most commonly 16 to 18 days.

Who is at risk?

Anyone who comes into contact with infectious mumps can get mumps, unless they have been infected in the past or have been immunised.

How is it prevented?

- People with mumps should stay at home for nine days after the onset of swelling of the salivary glands to help stop spreading the virus to others.
- MMR vaccine protects against mumps, measles and rubella, while MMRV protects against these and varicella, and both are part of the standard vaccination schedule. MMR vaccine should be given to children at age 12 months and MMRV at 18 months of age.

- People born after 1965 should ensure they have received two doses of mumps containing vaccine.

How is it diagnosed?

The doctor will usually diagnose mumps based on the person's symptoms and signs alone. A blood test or sample from the throat, urine or spinal cord fluid can confirm the diagnosis.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for mumps. Simple analgesics like paracetamol may reduce pain and fever. Warm or cold packs to the swollen glands may provide relief.

What is the public health response?

- Laboratories, school principals and directors of childcare centres must report all cases of mumps to their local public health unit. These reports provide statistics to help understand trends in the incidence of mumps in the community.
- People with mumps should stay away from childcare, school and work for nine days after the onset of the swelling of the salivary glands.

For further information please call your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055 or visit the New South Wales Health website www.health.nsw.gov.au