

Fact Sheet

Mumps

What causes mumps?

Mumps is caused by a virus.

How does mumps spread?

Mumps spreads from person to person through the air. It is less contagious than measles or chickenpox.

How long does it take to show signs of mumps after being exposed?

The incubation period of mumps is 14-18 days, but can range from 14-25 days.

What are the symptoms of mumps?

Individuals with mumps usually first feel sick with such nonspecific symptoms as headache, loss of appetite, and low-grade fever.

The most well-known sign of mumps is "parotitis," the swelling of the salivary glands, or parotid glands, below the ear. Parotitis occurs only in 30%-40% of individuals infected with mumps.

Up to 20% of persons with mumps have no symptoms of disease, and another 40%-50% have only nonspecific or respiratory symptoms.

How serious is mumps?

In children, mumps is usually a mild disease. Adults may have more serious disease and more complications.

What are possible complications from mumps?

Central nervous system involvement (meningitis) is common, but is usually not serious. Meningitis (with headache, stiff neck) occurs in up to 15% of people with mumps, but usually resolves without any permanent damage.

Up to 50% of postpubertal males experience "orchitis," or testicular inflammation, as a complication of mumps. This may involve pain, swelling, nausea, vomiting, and fever, with tenderness of the area possibly lasting for weeks. Sterility is a rare complication, however.

An increase in spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) has been found among women who developed mumps during the first trimester of pregnancy; however, there is no evidence that mumps causes birth defects.

Deafness, in one or both ears, can occur in approximately one per 20,000 reported cases of mumps.

Is there a treatment for mumps?

There is no "cure" for mumps, only supportive treatment (bed rest, fluids, fever reduction).

How do I know if my child has mumps?

Mumps is diagnosed by a combination of symptoms and physical signs and laboratory confirmation of the virus, as not all cases develop characteristic parotitis and not all cases of parotitis are caused by mumps.

How long is a person with mumps contagious?

The infectious period lasts approximately seven days. The infectious period is considered to be three days before symptoms begin to the fourth day following the onset of symptoms.

If I think my child has been exposed to mumps, what should I do?

If your child has not been vaccinated against mumps, receiving the vaccine after exposure to the virus will not help prevent disease if the child has already been infected. However, if the child did not become infected after this particular exposure, the vaccine will help protect him or her against future exposure to mumps.

How common is mumps in the United States?

Due to good immunization coverage, mumps is now rare in the United States. An estimated 212,000 cases occurred in 1964, while only 266 cases were reported in 2001. However, mumps virus is still present in the United States and the world, and the number of cases would quickly begin to climb if we were to stop vaccinating against this disease.

Can you get mumps more than once?

No.

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This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have this infection, consult a health care provider.

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