

MUMPS

Mumps is a viral infection, it mainly affects the salivary glands, but sometimes other parts of the body are affected. Mumps normally affects children, but can occur at any age.

What are the usual symptoms of mumps?

- Headache and fever, followed by swelling and pain on one or both parotid glands. (The parotid glands are the main salivary glands. They are just below the ears and you cannot normally see or feel them. The salivary glands make saliva which drains into the mouth.)
- The mouth may feel dry. Chewing and swallowing may be painful.
- You may feel tired and off your food for a few days.
- Mild abdominal (tummy) pain may occur.

The swelling of the parotid glands usually lasts 4-8 days. Mumps is normally a mild illness, but complications sometimes occur. This is why immunisation is important.

There may be no symptoms, or only very minor ones. It is thought that about 3 in 10 people who contract the mumps virus have no symptoms.

The immune system makes antibodies during the infection. These fight off the virus and then provide lifelong immunity. It is therefore very rare to have more than one episode of mumps.

What are the possible complications of mumps?

- The testes (testicles) and ovaries are sometimes affected. One testis may become inflamed, swollen and painful for a few days. This affects about 1 in 4 males over the age of 12, (but is uncommon in young children) There is no firm evidence that this causes sterility.
- Brain Inflammation (encephalitis or meningitis) is an uncommon complication. It typically causes drowsiness, headache, stiff neck, wanting to keep out of the light and vomiting. Although alarming, meningitis caused by the mumps virus usually clears after a few days without any long-term problems. However, deafness in one ear is a rare long-term problem that can occur.
- Inflammation of the pancreas, heart and other organs are rare complications.

What is the treatment for mumps?

There is no medicine that kills the mumps virus. Treatment aims to ease symptoms until the body's immune system clears the virus.

- You do not need treatment if symptoms are mild.
- Paracetamol (Calpol, Disprol, etc.) can ease fever and pain. Ibuprofen is an alternative although if you are an asthmatic care should be taken using Aspirin or any non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs e.g. Ibuprofen.
- Keep cool if you have a fever by ventilating your room by opening your bedroom window; lay your duvet across your body so that your feet stick out.
- Drink plenty of non - alcohol drinks such as water particularly if you have a fever. Fruit juice may stimulate the parotid gland to make more saliva, and cause more pain. Water is best if this occurs.

- A warm flannel held against a painful parotid gland is soothing.

When to seek medical help?

Seek Medical help when symptoms appear: crucially a swollen painful jaw / cheeks and go back to the doctor if your symptoms worsen.

Most people are back to normal within 7-10 days, however, rarely complications can occur. If this is you, please seek medical advice.

Should people with mumps keep away from others?

Yes. Mumps is very infectious (contagious). It is passed on by coughing and sneezing the virus into the air. It takes 14-21 days to develop symptoms after being infected. Affected people are most infectious from 2 days before until about 5 days after a parotid gland begins to swell. Please limit your movements and stay at home as it is best not to mix with others once mumps is suspected.

Tell someone that you are unwell so that they can bring in food and drinks

Mumps Immunisation

People immunised against mumps are unlikely to catch mumps. However, immunisation may not be 100% effective after the first dose, which offers 90-95 % immunity, therefore 2 doses are recommended.

Immunisation is now offered to all children in the UK. It is part of the MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) vaccine. Two doses are usual - the first aged 15 months and the second about 3 years later.

Fresher students have been offered the opportunity to receive MMR at the start of this academic year. There is no upper age limit and MMR can be given to non-immune adults.

A second dose can be given 3 months later.

It takes approximately one month for Antibodies to develop following immunisation.

Are You Pregnant?

Although there is no evidence of fetal abnormalities, mumps in the first trimester of pregnancy, may increase the rate of spontaneous abortion caused by any high fever (as can happen with other viral infections)

References:

1. Immunisation against Infectious disease 1996.
2. Health Protection Agency.
3. BNF.
4. Forfar and Amelís Textbook of Paediatrics, 5 Ed. 1998 Edited by Campbell AGM and McIntosh N p.1371-1372.