Public Health England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Mumps Factsheet

What is mumps?

Mumps is an acute viral illness in which the salivary parotid glands in the cheek and jaw, swell and become painful. Mumps usually occurs in people who have never been or only partially been immunised.

How do you catch mumps?

Mumps is highly infectious. It is spread by respiratory droplets through coughing or sneezing, or by direct contact with the saliva of an infected person. It can take 12 to 25 days to develop symptoms after being infected and individuals with mumps are infectious from up to a week before swelling of the glands develops until five days afterwards.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms are:
* fever, headache, tiredness, aching muscles and joints and a reduced appetite lasting several days
* then swelling and pain of one or both salivary parotid glands lasting 4-8 days. (The parotid glands are found at the side of the face just below the ears and usually cannot be seen or felt.)
* dry mouth and difficulty or pain on chewing and swallowing.

About a third of people have no symptoms at all.

Are there any complications?

Mumps is normally a mild illness. However the following complications can sometimes occur:
* Viral meningitis in 1 in 7 cases.
* Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) in 1 in 400 of cases associated with deafness in one or both ears.
* Inflammation of the pancreas, heart and other organs
* Inflammation of the testes (testicles), usually on one side, in 1 in 5 of adolescent or adult males occasionally causing infertility.
* Inflammation of the ovaries 1 in 20 of adolescent or adult females; again, occasionally causing infertility.

What do I do if I think my child has, or I have, mumps?

You should contact your GP and mention that you suspect an infectious illness so they can put you at the end of their appointment list.

PHE recommend that anyone with mumps should not go to school, nursery, attend group child care or go to work for the period that they feel unwell and for five days following the onset of swollen glands. Careful handwashing and disposing of tissues is very important.

Is there any treatment?

Treatment is aimed at relieving symptoms until the body's immune system clears the virus. Paracetamol can ease fever and pain. Ibuprofen is an alternative (but caution needed in asthmatics). Drinking plenty of fluids is advised, particularly if there is a fever, although fruit juice can stimulate the parotid gland to make more saliva and cause more pain.

Most patients fully recover within 7 days and will have lifelong immunity.

How can I prevent my child or myself from getting mumps?

> The only effective way to prevent mumps is to immunise your child or yourself against it. Most people who get mumps have usually not had the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine.

Two doses of MMR vaccine are needed to give children the best protection against all three illnesses before they go to school. We strongly recommend that children over the age of 12 months who have not had the MMR vaccine should be immunised with two doses of the MMR vaccine even if they may have had mumps. Timing of the second dose will depend on local outbreaks. Please speak to your GP.

As the two-dose MMR schedule was not introduced until 1996, there have been recent outbreaks of mumps among teenagers and adults because they are not fully immunised. These individuals should contact their student health service, school nurse or GP to find out how they can get up to date with their MMR vaccination.

Advice for pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals

There is no specific action for pregnant women or immunocompromised who have come into contact with an infected individual. Mumps in pregnancy does not cause congenital malformations. Mumps illness is often milder in people who are immunocompromised than in otherwise fit people.

For further information try these useful websites:

http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/mumps/Pages/Introduction.aspx
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/mumps-guidance-data-and-analysis