

Mumps--FAQs

Mumps Disease

What is mumps?

It is an infection caused by the mumps virus.

Who can get mumps?

Anyone who is not immune from either previous mumps infection or from vaccination can get mumps. Before the routine vaccination program was introduced in the United States, mumps was a common illness in infants, children and young adults. Because most people have now been vaccinated, mumps is now a rare disease in the United States. Of those people who do get mumps, up to half have very mild, or no symptoms, and therefore do not know they were infected with mumps.

What are the symptoms of mumps?

The most common symptoms are fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness and loss of appetite followed by onset of parotitis (swollen and tender salivary glands under the ears-on one or both sides). Mumps can lead to hearing loss, aseptic meningitis (infection of the covering of the brain and spinal cord) in about 10% of cases, painful, swollen testicles in 20% to 30% of males who have reached puberty (orchitis) but rarely does this lead to fertility problems, and painful swollen breasts in about 30% of women who have reached puberty (mastitis), and in a very few cases, inflammation of the ovaries.

Are there complications of mumps?

Severe complications are rare. However, mumps can cause:

- Inflammation of the brain and/or tissue covering the brain and spinal cord (encephalitis/meningitis)
- Inflammation of the testicles (orchitis)
- Inflammation of the ovaries and/or breasts (oophoritis and mastitis)
- Spontaneous abortion particularly in early pregnancy (miscarriage)
- Deafness, usually permanent

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms typically appear 16-18 days after infection, but this period can range from 12-25 after infection.

How is mumps spread?

Mumps is spread by mucus or droplets from the nose or throat of an infected person, usually when a person coughs or sneezes. Surfaces of items (e.g. toys) can also spread the virus if someone who is sick touches them without washing their hands, and someone else then touches the same surface and then rubs their eyes, mouth, nose etc. (this is called fomite transmission).

How long is an infected person able to spread the disease?

Mumps virus has been isolated from respiratory secretions 3 days before the start of symptoms until 9 days after onset.

What is the treatment for mumps?

There is no specific treatment. Supportive care should be given as needed. If someone becomes very ill, they should seek medical attention. If someone seeks medical attention, they should call their doctor in advance so that they don't have to sit in the waiting room and possibly infect other patients.

How do I protect myself (my kids/my family)?

Mumps vaccine (usually MMR), is the best way to prevent mumps. Other things people can do to prevent mumps and other infections is to wash hands well and often with soap, and to teach children to wash their hands too. Eating utensils should not be shared, and surfaces that are frequently touched (toys, doorknobs, tables, counters, etc) should also be regularly cleaned with soap and water, or with cleaning wipes.

Vaccine

Is there a vaccine to prevent mumps?

Yes. Two doses of mumps-containing vaccine, given as combination measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine, separated by at least 28 days, are routinely recommended for all children. The first dose is given on or after the first birthday; the second is given at 4 - 6 years of age. MMR is a live, weakened (attenuated) vaccine. Most adults who have not been vaccinated should also receive 1 dose of MMR vaccine, but adults who work in healthcare, a school/university setting, and persons at high risk of exposure to mumps should get 2 doses. Pregnant women and persons with an impaired immune system should not receive live attenuated vaccines (MMR vaccine).

Is the vaccine effective/does it work?

One dose of mumps vaccine will 'take' (be effective) in approximately 80% of people vaccinated, but two doses of mumps vaccine will 'take' in approximately 90% of people. Therefore, two doses are better at preventing mumps than one dose.

Where can I get the vaccine?

Most family and pediatric doctors keep vaccine in their clinics; and local health departments usually have vaccine. If someone isn't sure where to get vaccine, they can call the local or state health department.

What should I do if I don't know if I've been vaccinated?

Get vaccinated. The MMR vaccine is safe and there is no increased risk of side effects if a person gets another vaccination.

If I had mumps as a child, can I get it again/should I get vaccinated?

Most people who have mumps will be protected (immune) from getting mumps again. There is a small percent of people though, who could get reinfected with mumps and have a milder illness. If mumps was not diagnosed by a physician, then that person is not considered immune and vaccination is recommended.

If I was exposed to someone with mumps, what should I do?

Not everyone who is exposed to someone with mumps will get sick. If a person has been vaccinated with two doses of mumps vaccine, it is very unlikely they will get mumps. However, if a person hasn't been vaccinated, it is possible they could get sick and they should watch for symptoms of mumps. Additionally, if a person hasn't been vaccinated, this is a good time to get another dose of mumps vaccine, and to make sure that everyone else in the house where they live is also vaccinated. Mumps vaccine has not been shown to be effective in preventing disease after exposure, but vaccination of exposed susceptible persons will reduce the risk of disease from possible future exposures. If symptoms develop (generally 16-18 days after exposure), the person should not go to school or work for at least 9 days and should contact their medical provider.

Current Mumps Outbreak

How many cases usually occur in the US each year?

In the United States, since 2001, an average of 265 mumps cases (range: 231-293) have been reported each year. ("MMWR Dispatch – Mumps Epidemic – Iowa, 2005"

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm55d330a1.htm>

When did the outbreak in the Midwest start?

The first cases of mumps-like illness were reported from Iowa in December 2005. More cases have been in Iowa, and in several other states.

Where did the outbreak in the Midwest start?

The current information indicates that the outbreak may have begun on a college campus. Colleges that have group living, dining, studying, and sports are areas that make disease transmission more likely, and increase the chance of outbreaks. Once started, such outbreaks sometime spread to the community, causing illness in persons who do not attend college. For this reason, CDC recommends that all college students have two doses of measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. Studies have suggested that strict enforcement of these recommendations is important for preventing and stopping outbreaks.

Why are people who have been vaccinated getting sick?

One dose of mumps vaccine prevents approximately about 80% of mumps and two doses approximately about 90% of cases. Even though the vaccine is effective, if most persons in a population are vaccinated, most cases in an outbreak would also be expected to be vaccinated. However, if the vaccine hadn't been used, the outbreak would have affected everyone, rather than a small percent of the population.

Does the current vaccine work against the mumps virus that is causing the outbreak?

Yes. The strain of mumps virus in the Midwest is the same as the one that is found in other countries, and that caused a large ongoing outbreak in the United Kingdom (UK) with more than 60,000 cases. In 2005 a small mumps outbreak occurred in the US after a person visited from the UK and mumps vaccine was effective in controlling this outbreak.

Have there been other mumps outbreaks?

Yes. There has been an ongoing mumps outbreak in the United Kingdom (UK). This outbreak was mostly among unvaccinated young adults, 3.3% of them had 2 doses of mumps vaccine, and 30.1% had one dose of mumps vaccine. Related MMWR article "Mumps Epidemic --- United Kingdom, 2004—2005" can be accessed at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5507a1.htm>. There was a mumps outbreak in a camp in New York in 2005 that was believed to have begun after a camp counselor from the UK developed mumps. Related MMWR article "Mumps Outbreak at a Summer Camp --- New York, 2005" can be access at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5507a2.htm>.

Will there be an outbreak in the school I attend/where my child attends?

Many different things affect whether or not an outbreak of mumps might begin in a school, but outbreaks can only begin when there are enough people in an area (school or community) who are not immune from the disease. The best way to prevent a mumps outbreak in a school is to make sure that everyone in that school has had two doses of mumps vaccine (MMR).

What can be done to stop the spread of mumps?

Anyone with mumps should not go back to child care, school or work for 9 days after symptoms begin. People who come in contact with a mumps case should have their immunization status evaluated. Anyone who has not received mumps-containing vaccine (preferably MMR vaccine) should be vaccinated. The local health department or a physician can help determine if a person needs one or two doses of MMR vaccine. Persons who may have been in contact with a mumps case should be educated on the signs and symptoms of mumps disease and should seek medical attention if any of these symptoms begin.