

Mumps

Community and Public Health

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Mumps is a very contagious infection due to the mumps virus. It infects the salivary glands that are located on either side of the face, below the ears.

Nearly every child got mumps before a vaccine was available. Far fewer are infected these days. However, children who are not immunised are still susceptible to getting the disease.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms are swelling and soreness of the cheeks and jaw, that may be severe.

Mumps usually starts with neck or ear pain, loss of appetite, tiredness, headache, and low fever. About a third of persons infected with the mumps virus have no symptoms.

Symptoms usually start 16 to 18 days after infection with the virus, but the time can range from 14 to 25 days.

Occasionally, mumps can cause deafness. 1 in 10 people with mumps get meningitis (usually mild). Very occasionally people get inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) and very rarely a person who develops this will die.

If infected after puberty, 1 in 5 males gets testicle inflammation and 1 in 20 females gets ovary inflammation. In rare cases this leads to infertility.

How is it caught or spread?

Mumps is spread from person to person through direct contact with saliva and discharges from the nose and throat of infected persons.

Mumps can be spread by coughing, sneezing, kissing and sharing food or drink.

A person with mumps is most infectious from 2 days before the onset of the inflammation in the glands and for 5 days after.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for mumps.

Persons with mumps should drink plenty of fluids, get bed rest and take paracetamol to control fever.

Can it be prevented?

Mumps is preventable by free immunisation. The mumps vaccine is part of the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine series given to children at 15 months of age and 4 years. Children are not fully protected until they have had both doses.

If you have questions about immunisation, talk to your doctor or practice nurse or call the Immunisation Advisory Centre free helpline 0800 IMMUNE (0800 466 863).

Staying away from school

If your child has mumps, they should be kept home from school or early childhood services for 5 days after the swelling develops. This will help prevent the spread of mumps in your community.

If you are concerned about your child's condition at any stage contact the doctor.