Government of Western Australia
Department of Health

Mumps

What is mumps?

Mumps is an acute viral illness caused by the mumps virus. However it is now uncommon in Australia due to immunisation programs.

Mumps usually occurs in children, but older people without immunity to the virus can also get it.

The illness can result in serious complications, such as inflammation of the spinal cord and brain, hearing loss and infertility (not being able to have children).

Mumps infection during the first trimester of pregnancy has been associated with spontaneous abortion, but there is no firm evidence that mumps during pregnancy causes congenital malformations.

Infection gives most people lifelong immunity from mumps. A repeat infection is rare.

How do you get mumps?

Mumps is usually spread when a person breathes in the virus that has been sneezed or coughed into the air by an infectious person. Sharing saliva with an infected person can also spread the virus.

Mumps is most infectious from around 2 days before to 5 days after the onset of swollen salivary glands. However it can be infectious for up to 7 days before to 9 days after the onset of swollen salivary glands. It is possible to be infectious even with no symptoms.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms usually develop 12 to 25 days after being exposed to an infectious person. Symptoms include:

- fever
- mild upper respiratory illness
- headache
- aching muscles
- generally feeling unwell
- swollen salivary glands (behind and below the jaw)
- pain near the ear, worsening when chewing.

About one-third of people with mumps have mild or no symptoms but can still infect others who are not immune.

Most children under 2 have no symptoms.

How do I know I have mumps?

See your doctor if you think you or your child could have mumps. Your doctor will arrange tests to confirm the diagnosis.

Caution: when making your doctor's appointment, tell the staff that you may be infectious. You will need to wait in a separate area from others, especially young children.

Complications

Mumps infection can also lead to other health conditions, such as:

- Pneumonia, particularly in children under 5.
- Viral meningitis affects about 10 per cent of those infected, but is usually followed by good recovery.
- Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) is rare but often results in serious disability.
- Hearing loss is rare but can be permanent.
- Orchitis (swollen, tender testicles) occurs in about 20 to 30 per cent of infected males who are post-puberty (infertility due to orchitis is extremely rare).

- Pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) is not common.

Notifiable disease

Mumps is a notifiable disease. This means doctors, hospitals and laboratories must inform the Department of Health of your diagnosis. Notification is confidential.

Department of Health staff may talk to you or your doctor to find out how the infection occurred, to identify other people at risk of infection, to let you know about immunisation and to tell you if you need to stay away from work, school or other group gatherings.

Treatment of mumps

There is no specific treatment for mumps infection. Talk to your doctor about treating the symptoms.

Do not give aspirin to children under 12 years of age, as it may cause Reye's syndrome, a potentially life-threatening illness causing severe brain or liver damage.

Contact your doctor as soon as possible or ring Healthdirect Australia on 1800 022 222 if you develop any of the following symptoms and think you have mumps:

- severe headache
- testicle pain or swelling
- shortness of breath with increasing difficulty breathing
- stomach pain.

While you have the disease

You can prevent spreading the infection by following this advice:

- Stay away from work, school, group gatherings and anyone who may not be immune, until 5 days after the onset of swollen salivary glands.
- Tell people you were in contact with during the week before you became ill, that you have mumps.
- Don't share saliva, for example by sharing eating and drinking utensils or cigarettes.
- Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with warm soapy water for at least 15 seconds after blowing your nose and handling used tissues.

How can mumps be prevented?

Is there a vaccine for mumps?

Yes, the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR vaccine) measles, mumps and rubella (MMR vaccine) is available.

You and your family can avoid mumps infection by being vaccinated, or having immunity due to past infection. Talk to your doctor if you are unsure about your immunity.

Up-to-date vaccination is also important when travelling to countries where few people are immunised.

Where to get help

- See your doctor.
- Visit a GP after hours.
- Ring Healthdirect Australia on 1800 022 222.
- Contact your local public health unit.

Remember

- Mumps is an acute viral infection.
- It is usually a childhood illness but older people can also get it.
- Most people only get mumps once.

Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**

Acknowledgements

Public Health

This publication is provided for education and information purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical care. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your healthcare professional. Readers should note that over time currency and completeness of the information may change. All users should seek advice from a qualified healthcare professional for a diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

See also

- Childhood immunisation schedule

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

Produced by the Communications Directorate © Department of Health 2019

Copyright to this material is vested in the State of Western Australia unless otherwise indicated. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced or re-used for any purposes whatsoever without written permission of the State of Western Australia.