

Mumps

Mumps is a viral illness that causes fever and swollen salivary glands. Serious and potentially lethal complications include inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) or heart muscle (myocarditis). The disease is spread from person-to-person and is about as contagious as the flu.

Mumps is uncommon in developed countries including Australia because of the widespread use of the mumps vaccine. However, outbreaks still occur so it is important to continue vaccinating children.

Symptoms of mumps

Signs and symptoms of mumps may include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Weight loss
- Swollen parotid gland (the salivary gland located just in front of the ear) on one or both sides of the face
- Painful chewing
- Painful swallowing.

Complications of mumps

The inflammation may spread to other areas of the body. Some of the complications of mumps can include:

- Mastitis – breast inflammation
- Orchitis – testicle inflammation
- Oophoritis – ovary inflammation
- Meningitis – inflammation of the membranes called 'meninges' surrounding the brain and spinal cord
- Encephalitis – brain inflammation
- Myocarditis – heart muscle inflammation
- Pancreatitis – pancreas inflammation
- Hepatitis – liver inflammation
- Thyroiditis – thyroid inflammation
- Miscarriage in the first trimester of pregnancy
- Nerve deafness, usually in both ears.

How mumps is spread

Mumps is about as contagious as the flu. Mumps is most commonly spread when someone ingests (swallows) or inhales the cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person. The virus is also carried in urine. Symptoms occur between 14 and 25 days following infection.

One person in three who contracts mumps does not have any symptoms and doesn't realise they are sick. However, they are still contagious and may infect a lot of other people. An apparently healthy person who spreads an infectious disease is called a 'carrier'.

High risk groups

Mumps is uncommon in Australia thanks to vaccination, but cases still occur. Anyone who hasn't been vaccinated is at high risk, particularly if they travel to developing nations where vaccination programs aren't widespread.

Diagnosis of mumps

Tests used to diagnose mumps may include:

- Medical history, including immunisation status
- Physical examination
- Travel history
- Blood test.

Treatment for mumps

No specific medical treatment for mumps exists. Antibiotics don't work because the illness is viral. Treatment aims to ease symptoms and reduce the risk of complications. Options may include:

- Bed rest
- Plenty of fluids
- Paracetamol to reduce pain and fever
- Cold compresses held against the swollen parotid glands
- Soft and easy to swallow foods such as soup, porridge or pureed vegetables
- Isolation, to reduce the risk of spreading the disease.

Seek medical attention

An uncomplicated case of mumps usually resolves within about two weeks. See your doctor if the sick person:

- Complains of pain anywhere else, as this may be a sign of inflammation in another organ
- Runs a high fever
- Appears to be getting sicker.

Prevention

Immunisation is the best way to prevent mumps. People who are caring for someone with mumps should practise strict hygiene. For example, you should wash your hands frequently, particularly before handling, preparing or eating food and after visiting the toilet or changing a nappy. Don't share food or drink utensils. Encourage the sick person to cough or sneeze into a tissue.

Mumps vaccination is available

The mumps vaccine in Australia is combined with measles and rubella (German measles) vaccines (commonly known as MMR). A free vaccine that offers protection against mumps is available to:

- **Young children** – at 12 months of age
- **Children** – at four years of age
- **13 months to seven years of age inclusive** – as a 'catch-up' immunisation, if they have not been fully vaccinated.

Immunisation is also recommended for adults born during or since 1966 – unless you have evidence of having received two doses of MMR. If you have not received the vaccine, speak to your doctor about catch-up doses.

The immunisations you may need are decided by your health, age, lifestyle and occupation. Together, these factors are referred to as HALO.

Vaccination is not suitable for everyone

Not everyone should have the mumps vaccination. A person with an impaired immune system should not be vaccinated. Some of the possible causes of impaired immunity may include:

- Taking certain medications such as corticosteroids
- Receiving immunosuppressive treatment
- Having some types of cancer such as Hodgkin's disease or leukaemia
- Hypogammaglobulinaemia, a congenital or acquired condition characterised by extremely low levels of antibodies.

You should not be given the vaccine if you are already pregnant and pregnancy should be avoided for 28 days after the vaccination.

Pre-immunisation checklist

Before immunisation, it is important that you tell your immunisation provider if you (or your child) are:

- Unwell (temperature over 38.5°C)
- Have had a serious reaction to any vaccine
- Had a severe allergy to anything
- Have had a 'live' vaccine in the last month
- Pregnant.

Side effects of the mumps vaccine

The vaccine is effective and safe. However, all medicines can have unwanted side effects. Side effects from the mumps vaccine are uncommon and usually mild but may include:

- High fever (over 39°C)
- Faint red rash (not infectious)
- Drowsiness or tiredness
- Head cold or runny nose
- Cough
- Puffy eyes
- Swollen salivary glands
- Soreness and redness at the injection site.

Treating mild side effects

Some side effects may occur up to 10 days after immunisation but usually resolve quickly. There are a number of treatment options to reduce the side effects of the vaccination:

- Paracetamol to reduce any fever – check the label for the correct dose (especially for children)
- A cold, wet cloth held against the injection site
- Extra drinks
- Appropriate clothing – do not overdress.

Anaphylaxis is an extremely rare side effect

There is a very small risk of a serious allergic reaction to any vaccine. This is why you are advised to stay at the clinic or medical surgery for at least 15 minutes following vaccination in case further treatment is required. Apart from anaphylaxis, other extremely rare side effects include encephalitis and thrombocytopenia (abnormal bleeding caused by insufficient blood platelets).

If reactions are severe and persistent, or if you are worried, contact your doctor for further information.

Where to get help

- Your doctor

- Always call an ambulance in an emergency (triple zero) Tel. 000
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- Your local council immunisation service
- Immunisation Program, Department of Human Services Tel. 1300 882 008
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Maternal and Child Health Line is available 24 hours a day Tel. 13 22 29
- National Immunisation Infoline Tel. 1800 671 811

Things to remember

- Mumps is a viral illness that causes fever and swollen salivary glands.
- Mumps is uncommon in developed countries including Australia due to the widespread use of the mumps vaccine.
- Mumps is contagious, so people caring for someone with mumps should practise strict hygiene, for example wash hands frequently, particularly before handling, preparing or eating food.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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