

Mumps

Information Sheet

What is it?

Mumps is a serious and infectious viral disease. In the past, mumps infection was common in childhood but is now rare in New Zealand because of childhood immunisation programmes.

It is a notifiable disease under the Health Act 1956 and Public Health staff will contact cases to find how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, and give instructions on how to prevent further spread.

How does a person become infected?

Mumps is passed from person to person via droplet spread, meaning that to catch mumps a person must have contact with the fluid from the mouth and nose of another person with mumps. This can happen during sneezing, coughing and talking, or touching surfaces or objects contaminated with saliva or mucous, for example, used tissues, etc.

A person is infectious (meaning they can spread the illness onto others) 2 days before the swelling develops and for 5 days after the swelling began. It usually takes 16-18 days (range 12-25 days) for the illness to develop after being exposed to the virus.

What are the signs and symptoms of the illness?

Early symptoms of mumps include a headache, fever, muscle aches, tiredness and loss of appetite. The parotid glands under and in front of the ear, on one or both sides may become swollen and sore after two days. These glands produce saliva for the mouth. The swelling may last up to a week.

Men and adolescent boys can experience pain and swelling in their testicles (orchitis) which, in rare cases, can cause infertility. Females may experience oophritis (pain and tenderness in parts of the abdomen from swollen ovaries). For pregnant women, there is a risk of miscarriage if the infection occurs in the first 3 months of pregnancy.

In a few cases, mumps can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) or permanent hearing loss.

Some people with swollen parotid glands do not have mumps. The only way to confirm mumps is via a swab organised by a doctor.

How bad is it?

There is no specific treatment for mumps, but medication can help with symptoms such as pain and fever.

People with mumps usually recover completely within 10-12 days from when symptoms start. Up to one third of those with mumps infections have no symptoms at all, yet they are still infectious (can spread the disease).

Will I need time off school, childcare or work?

Your Communicable Disease Nurse or Health Protection Officer at your local Public Health Unit can give you advice on this.

If you have mumps it is important that you try not to pass it on, particularly to young children and to others who may not be protected by vaccination. This means that you should reduce as much as possible contact with others. You should:

- Make sure that you use tissues for blowing your nose, coughing and sneezing, then throw these tissues away and wash your hands.
- Try and stay around one metre away from others when possible.
- Avoid going places where a lot of people are gathered, and avoid young children.
- Not share any drink bottles or anything else that may be in contact with your spit or snot.
- Make sure you frequently wash your hands.

How do I avoid the illness?

Mumps used to be a common illness before we had an immunisation programme. Most cases of mumps are now seen in people who have not had a mumps vaccine. In New Zealand, the Measles Mumps Rubella (MMR) vaccination is offered to all children at the age of 15 months and then again at four years. This results in protection against mumps infection for most people but not everyone. Some people, particularly those born in certain overseas countries, did not have access to mumps vaccination as children and therefore are vulnerable to catching the virus.

If you have had mumps you will not get it again. Therefore, there is no need to then have a mumps vaccine, although you may still be at risk of getting rubella and measles if you have not had the MMR immunisation.

Sometimes we offer the MMR vaccine to people who have not had the mumps illness or vaccination before, particularly if they have been in contact with a known case of mumps. This may not provide protection soon enough if they have already been exposed to someone with the disease. However, the vaccine can provide protection to any future exposure to mumps or to measles and rubella infections.

It is never too late to get your MMR vaccine. Check with your doctor to find out if you are up-to-date with your immunisations.

What should I do if I think I have mumps:

If you think you have mumps, you should socially isolate yourself from others (do not go to work, school or childcare), then contact your doctor or Healthline as soon as possible for advice. Anyone with mumps symptoms should call ahead before visiting their doctor, after-hours clinic or emergency department so that steps can be taken to reduce the risk of infecting others in the waiting room.

For further information please contact:



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