

Mumps Fact Sheet

Mumps is a contagious viral illness that can be serious

The mumps virus typically infects the salivary glands and causes pain and swelling around the jaw, cheeks, and throat. The virus can spread to other tissues and glands, sometimes leading to serious complications. Anyone who isn't vaccinated against mumps or hasn't had the disease previously is at greater risk of getting mumps.

In the United States, most children are vaccinated against mumps, but it is still a common disease in many countries.

Mumps is spread from person to person

The mumps virus is spread by direct contact with saliva or respiratory droplets from the nose, throat, or mouth of an infected person. You can get sick by breathing in those droplets made when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, or by having contact with their saliva, such as when sharing drinks or kissing.

People with mumps are contagious beginning 2 days before their salivary glands start to swell until about 5 days after the swelling starts.

Mumps is more likely to spread and cause outbreaks in settings where people are in regular close contact, such as schools and daycares, college dormitories, military barracks, and some healthcare settings.

Signs and symptoms of mumps

Mumps is best known for causing parotitis, a swelling of the parotid salivary glands that are located under the ears. This can make one or both cheeks look puffy and lead to pain around the jaw. Other mild symptoms might appear a few days before the swelling starts, including:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle ache
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite

Symptoms appear about 2 to 4 weeks after exposure. Some people who have been vaccinated against mumps can still get the disease, but they usually have milder symptoms.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you think you have mumps

Other infections can cause symptoms similar to mumps. Your healthcare provider can order lab tests to confirm that your symptoms are being caused by the mumps virus.

Most people recover fully from mumps. There are no specific antiviral medications used to treat mumps infections, but your healthcare provider may recommend medications, such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen, to ease fever or pain. Severe symptoms or complications from mumps infection may require immediate medical attention.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you think you have been exposed to mumps

Some people who have been vaccinated against mumps can still get the disease, so it's important for everyone who had close contact with someone with mumps to monitor for symptoms and talk to their healthcare provider if they become sick.

People who have been exposed to mumps and have not had mumps before or been vaccinated against mumps might need to stay home from work, school, and other settings that might bring them into close contact with others.

Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself from mumps

Getting two doses of the mumps vaccine is the best protection against mumps. The vaccine is recommended for children at 12 months of age, with a second dose recommended at 4 to 6 years of age.