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Mumps FAQ

What is mumps?

Mumps is a viral disease characterized by swelling of the parotid or salivary glands along the face, neck and jaw. The swelling can last from two to ten days. The incubation period (time from when you were infected to when you have symptoms) is 12-25 days. Other symptoms, in addition to the swelling around the neck and jaw, include fever, malaise (tiredness), muscle aches and headache. Up to 25% of people with mumps may have few or no symptoms.

How does the mumps virus spread?

Mumps is spread by droplets of saliva or mucus from the mouth, nose, or throat of an infected person. Saliva can pass from one person to another when they share straws, spoons, forks, cups, cans, bottles and even lip gloss. Mumps is also commonly spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes, and a non-infected person inhales respiratory droplets that contain the virus.

How soon after infection do symptoms occur?

Symptoms usually occur 16 to 18 days after infection. The time between infection and illness can be as short as 12 days or as long as 25 days.

When can mumps be spread?

A person with mumps is most contagious before symptoms even appear. People with mumps are usually contagious from two days before to five days after the jaw/neck swelling starts.

How can a person with mumps avoid spreading it to others?

- Stay at home for five days after symptoms (salivary gland swelling) begin (required by Montana ARM 37.114.501), avoid school, work, social gatherings, and other public settings.
- Don't share eating or drinking utensils.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue available, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

Is there a vaccine to prevent mumps?

Yes, the mumps vaccine is given on or after a child's first birthday. In the United States, it is usually combined with measles and rubella vaccines, together known as MMR (measles, mumps and rubella). A second dose of mumps vaccine is recommended before children enter school (when they are four to six years old.) People who receive two doses of mumps vaccine are much less likely to develop mumps than those who have one dose or none.

Can people who have been vaccinated still get mumps?

Yes, for every 100 people vaccinated, **80** to 90 of them will be fully protected, but **10** to **20** are at risk for the disease. Though mumps vaccination cannot protect everyone, the vaccine greatly lowers the number of people who get sick when exposed to the virus. If a community maintains a high vaccination rate, the risk of exposure declines too. And while vaccination cannot protect everyone from developing mumps, people who get mumps following vaccination are at lower risk of problems and usually experience a more mild case.

How do I reduce my chance of getting the mumps?

People who have **2** doses of MMR are presumed to have immunity to mumps. Also, people born before 1957, people who have laboratory confirmation of the disease and people with positive titers (blood tests that can determine if a person has immunity) are also presumed to have immunity.

What should I do if I think I (or my child) was exposed to mumps?

If you are exposed to mumps and have been vaccinated, you are less likely to develop the disease. Two doses of MMR is required for enrollment in Montana schools. If your child has a religious or medical exemption for the MMR vaccine, they may be excluded from school until such time as it is safe for them to return, possibly **25** days or longer.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

If you or your child develops swelling along the face and neck along with a fever, please stay home from work, school, sports and all public gatherings for five days after symptoms start. You should seek medical care to be properly diagnosed.

Is there a treatment for mumps?

There is no cure for mumps, only supportive treatment (bed rest, fluids, and fever reduction).

How is mumps diagnosed?

Mumps is diagnosed by a combination of symptoms along with lab tests (either throat swab, blood and/or urine sample). Your health care provider will determine the appropriate test for diagnosis.

What problems can mumps cause?

- The vast majority of mumps cases do not lead to serious complications.
- The mumps virus can cause inflammation of the central nervous system, but the resulting illness (viral meningitis) is usually not serious. Headache and stiff neck may occur in **up to 15%** of people with mumps.
- Males who are past puberty may experience orchitis, or testicular inflammation. It causes pain, swelling, nausea, vomiting and fever. The affected area may remain tender for weeks. Approximately half of patients with orchitis experience some atrophy of the testicles, but they rarely lose the ability to produce sperm.
- Some women may experience inflammation of the ovaries or breasts from mumps.
- Deafness, in one or both ears, occurs in approximately one person out of 20,000 who develops mumps.

Why are some students not immunized against mumps?

Montana state law allows parents or guardians to claim medical or religious exemptions from state immunization requirements. This provision in state law allows students with these exemptions to attend school without the required vaccines.

What can be done to protect students who are not immunized against mumps?

Health department officials will be assessing students' immunization status and may decide, as allowed by state law, to exclude unimmunized students from school in order to protect the safety of the student and limit spread of the disease. If this action is taken, Health Department staff will contact parents directly to discuss this course of action. The good news is that guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control has determined that unimmunized students can return to school immediately if they are vaccinated against mumps.

Why are some students being excluded from school after children who have had the mumps have returned?

People with mumps are contagious until 5 days after the parotid swelling starts. They need to stay home for those 5 days but can return to school on day 6. Since mumps has a long incubation period(12 days) other students who were exposed will not develop symptoms until 12 days after exposure and as long as 25. That is why unvaccinated students will need to stay out of school for up to 25 days after the latest diagnosed case.

I know a child is unvaccinated but was back in school, why are they allowed back in?

The guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the CDC says unvaccinated students can be readmitted immediately after they are vaccinated.

Is mumps a serious disease?

Mumps can be serious, but most people with mumps recover completely in a few weeks. While infected with mumps, many people feel tired and achy, have a fever, and swollen salivary glands on the side of the face. Others may feel extremely ill and be unable to eat because of jaw pain, and a few will develop serious complications. Men and adolescent boys can develop pain or swelling in their testicles, which rarely results in sterility. Inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and loss of hearing can also occur, and in rare cases, this hearing loss can be permanent. The most serious complication is inflammation of the brain (encephalitis), which can lead to death or permanent disability.

I've been told that I need to stay away from people while I'm sick with mumps. What does that mean and why does it matter?

When you have mumps, you should avoid prolonged, close contact with other people until at least five days after your salivary glands begin to swell because you are contagious during this time. The time it takes for symptoms to appear after a person is exposed to the virus can range from 12 to 25 days. You should not go to work or school. You should stay home when you are sick with mumps and limit contact with the people you live with; for example, sleep in a separate room by yourself if you can. Staying home while sick with mumps is an important way to avoid spreading the virus to other people. People who are infected with mumps don't get sick right away—it can take 2 to 4 weeks for them to show signs of infection.