

Mumps: Questions and Answers

What is mumps?

Mumps is an infection caused by the Mumps virus that can infect people of any age. The Mumps vaccine is the best defense against Mumps. Mumps is not common in Newfoundland and Labrador due to high immunization rates.

How is it spread?

Mumps virus spreads in close contact with an infected person through droplets of saliva or mucus from the mouth, nose or throat, usually when the person coughs or sneezes. You can become infected when you breathe in these droplets or touch objects contaminated with the virus.

The virus may be spread through direct contact with the saliva of an infected person through kissing or sharing food, drinks, cigarettes, or drinking bottles.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can appear from 12 to 25 days after contact with someone who is infected with mumps. In the beginning the person may have symptoms such as headache, dry mouth, tiredness, low grade fever and loss of appetite.

The most well-known symptom of mumps is the swelling of one or more of the salivary glands on either side of the face and may occur after 1-2 days and last for two days or more.

Some people with mumps have no symptoms at all. However, they are still infectious and can spread the disease to other people.

What are possible complications?

Complications of mumps infection include encephalitis (infection in the brain) and meningitis (infection in the lining of the brain). As well painful swelling of the testicles (orchitis) or the ovaries (oophoritis), pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) or deafness may occur but are usually temporary. Pregnant women who become infected with mumps during the first three months of pregnancy are at risk of miscarriage.

How long is someone with mumps contagious?

Mumps virus can be infectious for seven days before salivary glands begin to swell and up to nine days afterwards.

Who is at risk of getting mumps?

Most people born in Canada before 1970 are likely to be protected from mumps. People at risk include anyone born in Canada in 1970 or later who:

- Anyone born in Canada in 1970 or later who has not received two doses of mumps containing vaccine and never had mumps disease
- Infants under the age of 12 months are most at risk because the vaccination is not given until children are 12 months of age or older.

What should I do if I was in contact with someone who has mumps?

If you have been exposed to someone with mumps and have not had the disease or the recommended number of doses of a mumps vaccine you should get immunized. Most people born in Canada before 1970 are likely to be protected from mumps and will not need immunization. People born after 1970 may have only received one dose of mumps vaccine and should check their immunization records. A second dose of vaccine should be considered for added protection.

Getting the mumps vaccine after being exposed to the virus will not prevent infection. However, if you don't become infected, the vaccine will provide protection against future exposures.

What should I do if I have symptoms of mumps?

If you think you have mumps stay home and call your health care provider's office. Tell them that you may have been exposed to mumps. The office needs to arrange appropriate infection control measures for the time of your appointment so that you can be seen quickly and without infecting other people. If possible bring your immunization record with you.

Persons diagnosed with mumps or suspected of having mumps should not attend daycare school or work, should not participate in group activities and should refrain from having visitors for five days following the start of salivary gland swelling.

Avoid activities such as kissing or sharing food, drinks, cigarettes, drinking bottles, or musical instruments where you may come into contact with saliva. When coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, or use your sleeve. Always wash your hands after coughing or sneezing.

How is mumps diagnosed?

In addition to a physical examination a blood test, swab of your salivary glands inside your mouth or a urine sample may be collected to make the diagnosis of mumps.

Can I get mumps more than once?

No. People who have had mumps are generally protected for life.

How is mumps treated?

There is no effective treatment for mumps. Pain can be reduced with acetaminophen. Hot or cold compresses may also ease the pain in the salivary glands.

Families should practice the following good health habits:

- Clean hands well and often and teach children to clean their hands, too.
- Do not share eating or drinking utensils.
- Clean surfaces that are frequently touched, including toys, door knobs, tables, and counters regularly with soap and water or cleaning wipes.
- Minimize close contact with other people when they are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, put your used tissue in the trash can and clean your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow. Clean your hands after coughing and sneezing.