

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Mumps

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 305 South Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

What is mumps?

Mumps is a contagious disease caused by a virus. The most common symptom is swelling of the cheeks and jaw due to inflammation of one or both of the saliva glands near the ear and back of the jaw. However, up to half of the people with mumps may not have enough swelling to show. Other symptoms include fever, headache, stiff neck and loss of appetite. Mumps is more common in children than in adults, but it can cause serious problems at any age.

Is mumps dangerous?

Mumps is usually a mild disease, however, it can cause complications. In more than 1 out of 3 men, mumps causes swollen testicles. In 1 out of 20 women, mumps causes swollen ovaries. This swelling can cause sterility, although this is rare.

Mumps sometimes causes problems in other organs, including the heart, pancreas, and joints, which can lead to permanent damage. The most serious problems caused by mumps are inflammation of the thin membrane that covers the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and inflammation of the brain itself (encephalitis).

Meningitis occurs in 15% of people who have mumps and is more common in adults than in children.

Deafness may occur in 1 out of 20,000 people who have mumps.

Mumps infection during the first trimester of pregnancy may increase the risk of miscarriage.

How is mumps spread?

The virus that causes mumps lives in the nose, mouth and throat, and is sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. Other people nearby can then inhale the virus. Touching a tissue or sharing a cup used by someone with mumps can also spread the virus. People with mumps are usually contagious from 2 days before until 5 days after their glands start swelling. Symptoms most often appear 2 - 3 weeks after a person is exposed.

Who gets mumps?

- Anyone who never had mumps and has never been vaccinated.
- Infants younger than 12 months old, because they are too young to be vaccinated.
- A small percentage of vaccinated children and adults who may not have responded well to the vaccine.

How is mumps diagnosed?

Mumps is often diagnosed by its symptoms, but this is not always reliable. A blood test can be used to diagnose mumps, but this test is not always definitive. Sometimes multiple blood tests taken over time are needed to diagnose mumps. A swab taken from the inside of the cheek may also help diagnose the disease.

How can you prevent mumps?

- Mumps vaccine is usually given in a shot called MMR, which protects against measles, mumps and rubella. There are now many fewer cases of these three diseases because children get the MMR vaccine. Protect your children by having them vaccinated when they are 12 - 15 months old, and again when they are about to enter kindergarten.
- State regulations require certain groups to be vaccinated against mumps. Child care workers and children in child care and preschool need to have one dose of mumps vaccine. Students in kindergarten,

grades 1 – 12 and in college need two doses of MMR vaccine for school entry. A blood test that proves immunity can also be used to fulfill this requirement for all groups.

- Adults born in or after 1957 should have at least 1 dose of MMR.
- People in high risk groups such as health care workers (paid, unpaid and volunteer), health science students and international travelers should have 2 doses of MMR, regardless of year of birth.
- Women who plan to have children and are not immune should get MMR at least 4 weeks before getting pregnant.
- People with mumps should be kept away from people who are not immune until they are well again. State regulations require anyone who catches mumps to be isolated for 5 days after the onset of gland swelling. That means they must be kept away from public places like day care centers, school and work.

Is MMR vaccine safe?

Yes. It is safe for most people. However, a vaccine, like other medicines, can cause side effects in some people. The MMR vaccine can cause fever, mild rash, temporary pain or stiffness of the joints. More severe problems, such as seizures, bleeding problems or allergic reactions are very rare. Getting MMR vaccine is much safer than getting mumps, and most people do not have any problems with the vaccine.

Who should not get MMR vaccine?

- People who have serious allergies to gelatin, the drug neomycin, or a previous dose of the vaccine.
- Pregnant women or women who are trying to get pregnant within 4 weeks should not get MMR vaccine until after they deliver their babies.
- People with cancer, HIV, or other problems or treatments that weaken the immune system should check with their doctor or nurse before getting vaccinated.
- People who have recently had a transfusion or were given other blood products should check with their doctor or nurse before getting vaccinated.
- People with high fevers should not be vaccinated until after the fever and other symptoms are gone.

Should healthcare workers be extra careful about mumps?

Yes. Healthcare workers who are not immune to mumps can become infected and spread the virus to their coworkers and patients. That is why it is required that all health care workers who are exposed to mumps and have no record of mumps vaccination or whose blood tests show that they are not immune stay out of work from the 12th day through the 26th day after being exposed to the disease. Healthcare workers should have proof of immunity to mumps, either through vaccination or blood test.

Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic, or your local board of health (listed in the phone book under local government).
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Immunization Program (617) 983-6800 or toll-free at (888) 658-2850 or on the MDPH Website at www.state.ma.us/dph/.
- Boston providers and residents may also call the Boston Public Health Commission at (617) 534-5611.
- CDC National Immunization Information Hotline:
 - English: 1-800-232-2522 or Spanish: 1-800-232-0233 (Mon – Fri, 8am – 11pm)
 - TTY: 1-800-243-7889 (Mon – Fri, 10am – 10pm)