

Mumps

What is it?

Mumps is an infectious disease caused by a virus. Its most obvious symptom is enlargement of one or both salivary glands on each side of the jaw. In males, especially adults, mumps can also cause painful swelling of the testes.

How does it occur?

The disease can occur in anyone who has antibodies against it. One attack of mumps normally produce enough antibodies to give that person life-long immunity against a second attack. Most adults are immune to mumps, so, although the disease can occur at any age, it's more common in children under 16.

Mumps can occur in outbreaks, especially in boarding schools and other institutions, but the pattern is changing thanks to vaccination.

What is the incubation period?

The incubation period is two to three weeks, so the symptoms can take up to 21 days to appear after exposure to the virus. Mumps is catching from a few days before symptoms start until salivary glands return to normal.

What are the symptoms?

The first signs of mumps are usually:

- Fever
- Feeling generally unwell
- Aching at one or the other side of face or jaw.
- Pain and soreness on swallowing.

Over the next day or so, one or both parotid salivary glands usually swell up visibly, and may cause pain when eating or drinking. If only one side is swollen, the other can follow suit a few

days later. Usually gland enlargement lasts about a week, but the other symptoms subside sooner than this.

Sometimes other salivary glands, for instance those under the chin, are enlarged in mumps.

What are the complications?

Possible complications include inflammation of the testes (known as orchitis), which occurs in about one in four boys over the age of 12 when they have mumps. It causes fever and pain in one or both testes, and usually sets in a few days after the salivary glands have begun to enlarge. The testicle may shrink a bit after an attack of mumps orchitis, but rarely causes infertility, as is sometimes feared.

Mumps meningoencephalitis generally causes symptoms such as fever, neck stiffness, headache, and a dislike of bright lights. Because it is caused by a virus, it resolves without antibiotics. However it can occasionally leave lasting effects, for instance deafness.

Occasionally mumps has been known to cause painful inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis), breasts, joints or thyroid gland. Any of these can happen even when the parotid glands aren't involved. There are usually no long-term effects.

It is thought that, in very rare cases, mumps infection in pregnancy may cause problems for the unborn baby. So, although nothing may need to be done, it is worth a pregnant woman who has been in contact with mumps mentioning this to her doctor or midwife.

What tests can be done?

The virus or antibodies to it can be found in the saliva if necessary, but tests are not usually done in mumps.

What is the treatment?

Although there is no cure for mumps, several measures can ease the symptoms.

- Eating soft or pureed foods helps mouth discomfort, as does avoiding citrus fruits and juices.
- An ice pack, or a warm face-cloth, placed on the side of the jaw can be soothing.

- Fever can be controlled with paracetamol, plenty to drink, and sponging down the lukewarm water if necessary.
- Although bed rest isn't essential in straightforward mumps, staying at home may help prevent spread of the disease.
- Bed rest may benefit mumps orchitis. A scrotal support helps.

How can it be prevented?

Vaccination against mumps is very effective. Measles, mumps and rubella vaccine(MMR) is available in Kenya. It is given at the age of 12 to 15 months(before this, babies still have some protection acquired from their mothers).

There are few reasons for avoiding MMR. These include pregnancy, suppression of the immune system, and allergy to ingredients used in the vaccine. Allergy to eggs is no longer believed to be a reason for withholding MMR vaccine.