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Mumps Facts



What is mumps?

Mumps is an infection caused by a virus. Sometimes, it can cause deafness, meningitis (infection of the brain and spinal cord covering), or painful swelling of the testicles or ovaries.

What causes mumps?

Mumps spreads when a person coughs or sneezes and the droplets enter the nose or mouth of another person. The mumps virus is also spread through saliva by sharing items such as cigarettes or drinking straws. Mumps can spread from about seven days before symptoms start until about five days after symptoms appear. Not everyone with mumps will have symptoms, but they will still be able to spread it to others. If you think you or your child has mumps, you need to let your doctor know so that they can take special care in the office to prevent spreading it to other people.

What are the symptoms of mumps?

Some symptoms of mumps are fever, headache, muscle pain, tiredness, loss of appetite and swollen glands. Most often it is the glands just below and in front of the ear that become swollen. Possible serious complications of mumps include meningitis (inflammation of the brain and spinal cord covering), swelling of the testicles or ovaries, inflammation of the pancreas or hearing loss. Infection in women in the first trimester of pregnancy can result in spontaneous abortion.

The symptoms of mumps can start about 14 to 25 days after being in close contact with someone with mumps. A person with mumps should stay home and avoid other people as much as possible for five days after symptoms start.

Mumps can be tested for through a blood test, taking a swab from the inner cheek or by a urine test.

Who is most at risk for mumps?

Outbreaks of mumps have occurred primarily among young adults in Ontario. The majority of people born between 1970 and 1992 did not receive the two doses of MMR vaccine required to fully protect against mumps. Young adults, particularly those in the high school, college and university age groups, are also most at risk as they live and socialize in close proximity. Students in secondary school or post secondary institutions, as well as health care workers should ensure that they have received two doses of MMR vaccine if they were born after 1970.

What is the treatment for mumps?

There is no medicine to treat mumps, but you can take medicine to help with the discomfort of the swelling.

How can I reduce the risk of mumps?

The best way to prevent mumps is to make sure you have been fully immunized. The MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine is a routine immunization in Ontario and is given after a child's first birthday, and again at 18 months.

You can also help stop the spread of mumps by washing your hands after coughing or sneezing, before preparing foods and before eating. If you do cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth. Do not share cigarettes or drink from the same glass, water bottle or straw as others.

