

Mumps

Information Sheet

What is it?

The mumps virus causes the illness Mumps. In the past, mumps infection was common in childhood but is now rare in New Zealand because of childhood immunisation programmes.

It is a notifiable disease under the Health Act 1956 and Public Health staff will contact cases to find how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, and give instructions on how to prevent further spread.

How does a person become infected?

It is passed from person to person via droplet spread, meaning that to catch mumps a person must have contact with the fluid from the mouth and nose of another person with mumps. This can happen during sneezing, coughing, touching tissues, direct contact, sharing drinks etc. It is less contagious than measles or chickenpox. It usually takes 16-18 days for the illness to develop after being exposed to the virus.

What are the signs and symptoms of the illness?

When a person gets mumps they may first have a headache and fever for a couple of days, and then the glands under and in front of the ear, on one or both sides begin to swell (parotid glands). These glands produce saliva for the mouth. The swelling may last up to a week.

Some people with mumps do not get swelling of the parotid glands instead they can get orchitis (males - inflammation of the testicles), or oophritis (females - pain and tenderness in parts of the abdomen can occur due to swelling of the ovaries).

Some people with mumps can also get encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

Some people with swollen parotid glands do not have mumps.

The only way to confirm mumps is via a swab organised by a doctor.

How bad is it?

There is no specific treatment for mumps, but medication can help with symptoms such as pain and fever.

People with mumps usually recover completely within 10-12 days from when symptoms start. A person with mumps can spread the disease to others for several days before symptoms begin, and up to 5 days after swelling

of the glands first started. Up to one third of those with mumps infections have no symptoms at all, yet they are still infectious (can spread the disease).

Will I need time off school, childcare or work?

Your Communicable Disease Nurse at your local Public Health Unit can give you advice on this.

If you have mumps it is important that you try not to pass it on, particularly to young children and to others who may not be protected by vaccination. This means that you should reduce as much as possible contact with others. Make sure that you use tissues for blowing your nose, coughing and sneezing, then throw these tissues away and wash your hands. Try and stay around one metre away from others when possible. Avoid going places where a lot of people are gathered, and avoid young children. Make sure that you do not share any drink bottles or anything else that may be in contact with your spit or snot. Make sure you frequently wash your hands.

How do I avoid the illness?

Mumps used to be a common illness before we had an immunisation programme. In New Zealand, the Measles Mumps Rubella (MMR) vaccination is offered to all children at the age of 15 months and then again at four years. This results in protection against mumps infection for most but not everyone.

If you have had mumps you will not get it again. Therefore, there is no need to then have a mumps vaccine, although you may still be at risk of getting rubella and measles if you have not had the MMR immunisation.

Sometimes we offer the MMR vaccine to people who have not had the mumps illness or vaccination before, particularly if they have been in contact with a known case of mumps. This may not provide protection soon enough if they have already been exposed to someone with the disease. However, the vaccine can provide protection to any future exposure to mumps or to measles and rubella infections.

It is never too late to get your MMR vaccine. Check with your Doctor to find out if you are up-to-date with your immunisations.

What should I do if I think I have mumps:

If you think you have mumps, are complaining of the signs and symptoms highlighted above, then you should visit a General Practitioner who will take a swab to diagnose mumps. It is important to see your doctor if you think that you have mumps, as it is a notifiable disease.

For further information please contact:



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