

Mumps Frequently Asked Questions

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Q: What is mumps?

A: Mumps is a contagious viral infection that can cause painful swelling of the salivary glands, especially the parotid glands (between the ear and the jaw). Some people with mumps won't have gland swelling. They may feel like they have a bad cold or the flu instead.

Mumps usually goes away on its own in about 10 days. But in some cases, it can cause complications that affect the brain, the testicles, the ovaries, or the pancreas.

Q: What causes mumps?

A: Mumps is a virus that is spread through exposure to an infected person's respiratory droplets (created during a cough or sneeze), saliva, or mucus. Sharing cups and utensils may also spread the virus.

Individuals are most likely to spread the virus three days before and five days after swelling starts. However, an individual can potentially spread the virus seven days before, and for nine days after, symptoms start.

Q: What are the symptoms?

A: Symptoms may include:

- Swelling and pain in the jaw. One or both cheeks may look swollen.
- Fever.
- Headache, earache, sore throat, and pain when you swallow or open your mouth.
- Pain when you eat sour foods or drink sour liquids, such as citrus fruit or juice.
- Tired
- Poor appetite.
- Testicular pain (males) or pelvic discomfort (females).

Q: How long until mumps symptoms appear?

A: Symptoms will typically appear 16 to 18 days after being exposed to the virus, though can be anywhere between 12 and 25 days. This is called the incubation period. Some people who are infected with the mumps virus don't have any symptoms.

If a person has more serious symptoms, such as a stiff neck or a severe headache, painful testicles, or severe belly pain, they should call a health care provider right away.

Q: How is mumps diagnosed?

A: Mumps is usually diagnosed based on symptoms and a history of exposure to the virus. If needed, a blood test can be done to confirm mumps and rule out other illnesses.

The mumps virus can also be identified using a sample of urine, saliva, or cerebrospinal fluid. These tests are less frequently done.

If an individual thinks he or she has mumps, they should be sure to call ahead and explain the symptoms before going to a health care provider's office. It's important to stay away from other people as much as possible to prevent spread of the disease.

Q: How is mumps treated?

A: In most cases, people recover from mumps with rest and care at home. In complicated cases, a hospital stay may be required.

Anyone who has mumps should stay out of school, child care, work, and public places until five days after the salivary glands first started to swell.

Q: Who needs to be vaccinated against mumps?

A: All children (ages 12 months and over), adolescents, and adults born in 1957 or later without a valid contraindication should have documentation of vaccination or other evidence of immunity. Additionally, some healthcare personnel who were born before 1957 may also need proof of vaccination or other evidence of immunity.

Q: Is the vaccine against mumps safe?

Hundreds of millions of doses of measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine prepared either as separate vaccines or as the combined MMR have been given in the United States, and its safety record is excellent.

Q: If a person is vaccinated, aren't they protected against mumps?

A: Mumps can be prevented with MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine. MMR vaccine prevents most, but not all, cases of mumps and complications caused by the disease. Two doses of the vaccine are 88% (range: 66-95%) effective at preventing mumps; one dose is 78% (range: 49%–92%) effective.

Q: Why is it important to prevent mumps?

A: Getting vaccinated is important because mumps can sometimes cause serious problems. It is also important because mumps is a contagious disease and outbreaks can easily occur.

Q: Is mumps a serious disease?

A: Mumps can be serious, but most people with mumps recover completely within 10 days to a few weeks. While infected with mumps, many people feel tired and achy, have a fever, and swollen salivary glands on the side of the face. Others may feel extremely ill and be unable to eat because of jaw pain, and a few will develop serious complications. Men and adolescent boys can develop pain or swelling in their testicles, which rarely results in sterility. Inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord and loss of hearing can also occur, and in rare cases, this hearing loss can be permanent. The most serious complication is inflammation of the brain, which can lead to death or permanent disability.

Q: What should people do when there is a confirmed case of mumps?

A: Individuals should make sure they are up to date on their MMR vaccine.

Individuals also may have evidence of immunity to mumps.

This evidence includes:

- documentation of adequate vaccination*
- laboratory evidence of immunity
- birth before 1957
- documentation of physician-diagnosed mumps
- People should let a health care provider know right away if they believe they have mumps.

** One dose of a live mumps virus vaccine for preschool-aged children and adults not at high-risk, and two doses for school-aged children and for adults at high-risk (health care workers, international travelers, and students at post-high school educational institutions).*

Q: What is Spokane Regional Health District's role in responding to mumps cases?

A: Local health departments like SRHD work closely with state public health, in this case, Washington State Department of Health, to investigate mumps cases when they occur. Together, they:

- communicate with health care providers and offer technical assistance
- arrange for testing clinical specimens from suspected mumps cases
- alert clinicians and health care facilities about confirmed cases and testing recommendations
- provide education and information to the public and health care providers through a variety of media including the SRHD website.

Related resources:

Mumps Fact Sheet pdf ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#)) ([Marshallese](#)) ([Vietnamese](#)) ([Ukrainian](#)) ([Chinese](#))

[SRHD Mumps MMR Fact Sheet](#)

[SRHD Mumps Infographic \(pdf\) \(jpeg\)](#)

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