

# Mumps

## What is mumps?

Mumps is a disease caused by the mumps virus. Mumps was a common childhood disease before immunization. It is now more common in young adults.

Mumps can cause encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain, that can lead to seizures or brain damage. About 1 in 20 people with mumps get mumps meningitis, an infection of the lining of the brain.

Mumps can also cause temporary deafness. Permanent deafness occurs in less than 1 in 20,000 people who get mumps.

Adults and teens with mumps can have painful swelling of the testicles (about 1 in 4 cases) or ovaries (about 1 in 20 cases). Both of these conditions are temporary and rarely result in permanent damage or sterility.

Mumps infection in the early stage of pregnancy may increase the rate of miscarriage but has not been shown to cause birth defects.

## Is there a mumps vaccine?

There are 2 vaccines available in B.C. that provide protection against mumps:

1. Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) Vaccine
2. Measles, Mumps, Rubella and Varicella (MMRV) Vaccine

The vaccines are free as part of routine childhood immunizations and to others that need protection against mumps. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #14a Measles, Mumps, Rubella \(MMR\) Vaccine](#) and [HealthLinkBC File #14e Measles, Mumps, Rubella and Varicella \(MMRV\) Vaccine](#).

## How is mumps spread?

Mumps is very contagious and spreads easily. Mumps is spread by contact with saliva or mucus from the mouth, nose, or throat of an infected person. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, the virus spreads through droplets in the air. You can be exposed to the virus even if you are 2 meters away from someone with mumps. You can become infected when you breathe in these droplets or touch objects and surfaces contaminated with the virus. Sharing food, drinks or cigarettes, or kissing someone who has the virus can also put you at risk.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include fever, sore muscles, headache and swelling of the salivary glands, especially the parotid glands that are at the side of the cheeks.

About 1 in 3 people with mumps do not have salivary gland swelling. Up to 30% of people with mumps do not have any symptoms. But, they can still spread the mumps virus to other people.

Symptoms can appear from 12 to 25 days after mumps virus infection.

## What if I have been exposed to mumps?

If you have been exposed to someone with mumps and have not had the disease or the recommended number of doses of a mumps vaccine you should get immunized. Although getting the mumps vaccine after an exposure may not prevent you from becoming ill, it will protect you against future exposures to the virus. Check your immunization record to see how many doses of mumps vaccine you have received. If you were born in 1970 or later, either 1 or 2 doses of mumps vaccine are recommended for protection. Contact your health care provider to find out if you need to be

immunized. People born before 1970 are likely immune to mumps and do not need to be immunized.

### What should I do if I think I have mumps?

If you have swollen salivary glands, especially if you have been in contact with a person with mumps or traveled to an area with a mumps outbreak, get examined by a health care provider. It is best to call ahead so that you see a health care practitioner quickly and without infecting other people. Mumps can spread easily in places like waiting rooms and emergency rooms. The doctor or triage nurse can make sure that you are taken into a closed area for an examination and attend the clinic at a time when the waiting room is empty. Bring your immunization record with you. A physical examination, blood test, and swab of your salivary glands inside your mouth or a urine sample will be collected to make the diagnosis of mumps.

### How can I prevent spreading mumps to others?

A person with mumps can spread the virus to others from 7 days before to 9 days after symptoms develop. If you have mumps you can help prevent spreading it to others by:

- Staying home from school, daycare, work and other group settings for at least 5 days after your salivary gland swelling started
- Washing your hands regularly
- Coughing or sneezing into a tissue or sleeve rather than your hands
- Not sharing food, drinks or cigarettes, or kissing others

### What is the home treatment?

After seeing a health care provider, the following home treatment tips may help you to be more comfortable while you rest and recover.

- Drink plenty of fluids such as water, juice and soup, especially if you have a fever
- Get plenty of rest
- Use an ice pack or heating pad for a swollen or painful jaw. Be sure to place a light towel on the jaw to protect the skin
- Avoid sour foods and liquids because the inflamed salivary glands are very sensitive to sour tastes
- Eat ice chips or flavoured ice treats, and soft foods that do not require chewing

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen\* (e.g. Advil®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

\*Ibuprofen should not be given to children under 6 months of age without first speaking to your health care provider.

For more information on Reye Syndrome, see [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye syndrome](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control  
Provincial Health Services Authority

---

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca/health-library/healthlinkbc-files](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/health-library/healthlinkbc-files) or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.