

Mumps

Mumps is a disease that causes painful swelling of the salivary glands, along with other symptoms. It was once a common childhood disease. Now most children are vaccinated against mumps, but it can still occur. Although complications are possible, most children with mumps recover completely.

What is mumps?

Mumps was once one of the most common childhood diseases. It is caused by infection of the parotid glands (which are salivary glands) with the mumps virus. Its main symptom is swelling of the parotid glands on one or both sides of the face, near the lower jaw and cheek, and can be very painful. It spreads easily by contact with saliva from an infected person to people who have not been vaccinated or have not had the disease. Infection can spread to the testicles in older boys and men. Other complications are possible as well.

Today, nearly all children are vaccinated against mumps, and the disease is rare.

What does it look like?

The main symptom of mumps is swelling of the parotid glands:

- Swelling can occur on one or both sides of the face. Swelling usually develops first on one side and then the other.
- Swelling starts near the earlobe and spreads downward and forward along the jaw. The earlobe may be pushed upward. The area of swelling can become very large.
- Swelling develops rapidly, sometimes within a few hours, although usually over a period of 1 to 3 days. Then it resolves gradually, usually within a week or so.
- The neck and jaw area are very tender and painful. The pain may be at its worst when your child drinks acidic liquids, such as orange juice.
- Your child may have a low fever.

What are some possible complications of mumps?

- The most common complication in children is infection spreading to the brain or spinal cord (meningitis/encephalitis), causing severe headache and other symptoms. However, the illness is usually mild.

- In older boys and young men, mumps may spread to the testicles, causing painful swelling (orchitis). Although orchitis sometimes causes infertility, this occurs rarely.
- Several other complications are possible but also rare, including hearing loss and arthritis.

What puts your child at risk of mumps?

Not being vaccinated is the main risk factor for mumps. Children adopted from other countries who have not received the vaccine may be at risk.

Can mumps be prevented?

Yes. Mumps vaccine has reduced the rate of mumps among children by more than 99%. Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine is recommended for nearly all children: one dose is given at 12 to 15 months; a second dose at 4 to 6 years. If your child has missed the second dose of mumps vaccine, it should be given before 11 to 12 years of age.

How is mumps treated?

- There is no specific treatment for mumps. The disease usually goes away on its own in a week or so.
- Medications (such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen) can help to reduce fever and pain.
- Facial pain and swelling make it difficult for your child to chew and swallow. Give soft foods or liquids until the swelling begins to go down.
- To avoid spreading the virus, have your child avoid contact with others for 9 days after the swelling has started.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if your child's swelling doesn't start to get better within a few days or if your child develops any new symptoms, such as:

- Severe headache, confusion or behavior changes, stiff neck.
- Pain and swelling of the testicles or groin.
- Abdominal pain and tenderness.
- Vomiting.
- Chest pain.
- Joint pain.
- Reduced hearing or vision.

