

What is mumps?

Mumps is a viral infection of the salivary glands, especially the *parotid gland*, which lies in front of and below the ear. It was one of the common infectious diseases of childhood, but is not seen as often now because of the immunisation program.

What are the symptoms?

- Swollen and tender glands—one parotid gland swells first, and in 70% of cases the opposite side swells after 1 or 2 days (other glands that lie just below the jaw may also be infected)
- Fever
- Weakness and lethargy
- Dry mouth
- Discomfort upon eating or opening the mouth

How is it spread?

Mumps is spread by coughing or sneezing. The virus takes about 18 days to incubate after contact. Mumps is only a moderately infectious disease. It is infectious from 2 days before its onset up to the time the swellings disappear (usually after 6 days but can be up to 12 days).

The patient should be isolated, especially from adults who have not had mumps.

What are the risks?

Mumps usually is a mild illness, but an uncommon complication is swelling or inflammation of the testes in a male or of the ovaries in a female. It affects adolescents and adults, especially males. Swelling usually affects one side only, coming on 3 to 4 days after the neck swelling. The swelling, which can be very painful for a day or so, subsides after a few days. Sterility is rare, and occurs only if both testes are affected. Like any viral infectious disease, in very rare cases it can cause meningitis and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), deafness and pancreatitis.

What is the treatment?

There is no special treatment because the illness has to run its course. General measures are:

- Take paracetamol for pain or high fever.
- Rest until the fever settles.
- Follow a normal soft diet and take ample fluids. Drinking through a straw may be more comfortable.
- Apply heat to the glands (e.g. hot washers or towels) to help relieve any discomfort or pain.

School exclusion

Nine days from the onset of symptoms is recommended, or up to the obvious disappearance of the swollen glands.

What should you do?

Notify your doctor if:

- a boy gets pain or swelling in the testes or a girl complains of low abdominal pains
- the patient appears very sick (e.g. severe vomiting or headache), is delirious or has a stiff neck
- the hearing seems affected.

Notify school authorities.

How can mumps be prevented?

Mumps can be prevented by a vaccine, which in Australia is recommended to be given to children at 12 months and once more between 4 and 5 years. It is combined with the measles and rubella vaccines.