

Mumps

What is mumps?

Mumps is an infection caused by a virus. It usually causes fever, headache and swollen painful salivary glands in the cheeks. While anyone who is not immune can get mumps, it usually occurs in children between about five and nine years.

Apart from making a person feel miserable, mumps can sometimes cause more serious harm. It can cause inflammation of the brain or the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. Fortunately, permanent brain damage is rare.

Sometimes, nerve damage may cause permanent hearing loss after an infection with mumps. Before a mumps vaccine was available, many children suffered deafness from this cause.

Men in particular may be concerned about mumps, as one in five adolescent or adult males who gets mumps develops a painful swelling of the testicles and may become infertile.

Symptoms can develop from about 12 to 25 days after exposure to an infected person. A person can be contagious to others from about six days before they develop obvious symptoms.

How can I protect myself or my child from mumps?

A safe and effective vaccine is available to provide protection against mumps. The vaccine is usually part of the MMR vaccine (measles/ mumps/ rubella vaccine). This has the added benefit of protecting against two other serious infections - measles and rubella (also known as German measles).

MMR is recommended for children at 12 months of age, with a booster at four years of age. It contains very small amounts of weakened measles, mumps and rubella viruses.

Is the vaccine safe?

Some children may have a reaction to the vaccine six to 11 days after immunisation. However, this is not usually serious and is much less frequent than the problems that occur with natural infection. Some children may develop a fever or swollen glands and occasional-



ly a rash for a short time, but they are not infectious to others.

There is a rare risk of a mild, short-term, inflammation of the brain with the mumps vaccine, because it is still a live virus. However, this occurs at the rate of less than one case per million doses of vaccine.

Natural mumps has a much greater risk; one in 10 develops signs of mild inflammation of the brain's membrane, and at least one in 500 may develop a severe inflammation of the brain.

What if you are not sure if you have had mumps?

Even if you may have had mumps in the past, you can still safely receive the vaccine.

Who should not receive the MMR vaccine?

A small number of people may not be

able to have the MMR vaccine. These include:

- Women who are pregnant, or who are considering pregnancy within the next three months.
- People who have defective immune systems, eg. those with some types of cancer, or having some cancer treatments, or large doses of steroid drugs.

Your family doctor can advise you if there is any problem with you receiving the vaccine.

Need more information about mumps?

Ask your family doctor or contact your local Public Health Unit.