

Mumps

The Disease

Before vaccines, mumps was a common childhood disease. The most obvious sign of mumps is swelling of the cheeks and jaw, which is caused by inflammation in the salivary glands. Children with mumps usually also get a fever and headache. Generally, mumps is a mild disease, but it does have its serious side:

- About 1 child in every 10 who get mumps also gets meningitis (an inflammation of the covering of the brain and spinal cord)
- Occasionally mumps also causes encephalitis, which is inflammation of the brain itself. Usually the child recovers without permanent damage.
- About 1 out of every 4 teenage or adult men who get mumps develops a painful swelling of the testicles.
- Mumps can, rarely, cause deafness (about 1 in 20,000 cases) or death (about 1 in 10,000 cases).

Children get mumps through contact with others who are already infected with the mumps virus. The virus is spread through the air by coughing, sneezing, or simply talking.

Children start to show signs of mumps 2 to 3 weeks after they are exposed. They are contagious from about 12 to 24 days after exposure.

Mumps Fact: Mumps is now considered mainly a childhood disease. But it used to be known as a disease afflicting armies. Mumps was one of the leading causes of hospitalization during World War I.

Mumps Immunization

The mumps vaccine we use today was licensed in 1967, and is a live, attenuated (weakened) vaccine. The number of reported cases has dropped from over 150,000 in 1968 to only 666 in 1998.

Mumps vaccine is usually given together with measles and rubella vaccines in a shot called MMR. [Click here to jump to the chapter about MMR vaccine.](#)