



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: MUMPS



1. What is mumps?

Mumps is an acute, highly contagious disease characterised by swelling of the salivary glands, caused by the mumps virus. It is mostly a disease of childhood with the peak incidence between 5 and 9 years of age, but may also infect adults among whom complications such as meningitis and orchitis (swelling of the testis in sexually mature men) are common.

2. What are the symptoms of mumps disease?

In 30 to 40% of individuals, the infection is asymptomatic. In cases where clinical disease develops, signs and symptoms of mumps follow 16 to 18 days after exposure, and the illness begins with non-specific symptoms:

- Myalgia (pain in muscles)
- Headache
- Malaise
- Low-grade fever

This is followed by characteristic signs within 3 days:

- Swollen and painful salivary glands on one or both sides of the face
- Pain when chewing or swallowing

Complications of mumps are rare but can include the following:

- Meningitis
- Encephalitis
- Pancreatitis
- Orchitis (swollen and tender testicles)

3. Why is mumps a health problem in South Africa and the world?

Before the introduction of vaccination, mumps was endemic in many parts of the world, with annual peak incidences of approximately 0.1% to 1% of the population. Mumps rarely leads to fatalities, although there can be complications such as meningitis, more common in males than females.

Since the introduction of vaccination in the 1960s, the incidence of mumps disease has dropped by between 88 -99% in countries that are offering the vaccine. However, with insufficient vaccination coverage, resurgent outbreaks can occur, as was the case in the United States when a 5-fold increase in mumps incidence was reported between 1985 and 1987. This increase was accompanied by a shift in the age of peak incidence from 5-9 year old children to older persons with a peak in the 15-19 year olds. What these outbreaks indicate is that, mumps vaccination should be offered by countries that can maintain vaccination coverage of at least 90%, or countries that are in the elimination phase of measles, as mumps vaccine can be offered in combination with the measles vaccine.

4. Who is at risk?

- Babies less than 1 year of age
- Household contacts of persons infected with mumps
- Immunocompromised individuals
- Young adults

5. How do I know if I have or have had mumps disease?

Mumps disease can be diagnosed from the clinical presentation of swollen parotid glands, however, this can be confirmed by laboratory tests. You can consult your doctor or the nearest health centre for more information.

6. How is mumps transmitted?

- Nose and throat secretions of infected persons
- Airborne droplets from infected persons
- Sharing utensils with someone who has mumps

7. What is the treatment following mumps infection?

There is no specific treatment for mumps. Treatment is symptomatic and supportive measures are used. The patient should drink lots of fluids, get bed rest and take pain killers to ease the pain. The diet should contain soft foods such as mashed potatoes as this will require less chewing.

8. How is mumps prevented?

Immunisation with a highly efficacious and safe mumps vaccine is the best way to prevent mumps. In countries where it is available, mumps vaccine is given as a monovalent, as a bivalent measles-mumps (MM) or as a trivalent measles-mumps-rubella (MMR).

9. Who should get the mumps vaccine?

- Children aged between twelve and fifteen months
- Older children and adults who are at risk of mumps infection.

10. How and when is the mumps vaccine given?

- Mumps vaccine is given by injection to the right thigh in babies 12 to 15 months old
- For older children and young adults the vaccine is given to the right arm
- Only one dose is required and can be given as part of MMR or as a monovalent.

11. Should HIV positive individuals be vaccinated?

Asymptomatic HIV-infected infants should receive mumps vaccine at the recommended time. Adults who are asymptomatic can also be vaccinated. Individuals who have symptomatic HIV infection, but are not severely immunocompromised, can be considered for vaccination.

12. What are the side effects of the mumps vaccine?

The mumps vaccine is very safe. The most common side-effects are soreness at injection site, fever and rash. Severe reactions to mumps vaccine are rare.

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