Dear Alice,

If you have had the mumps can you get them again?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Mumps is a viral infection that mostly occurs in children aged 5 to 14 years, and causes swelling of the salivary glands at the top of the jaw, near the ears. It’s a rare disease in the United States – since kids are routinely vaccinated against measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), there are now fewer than 1,000 cases of mumps per year. Though the rates are low, in recent years, there have been several outbreaks which have resulted in a higher than usual number of cases. To answer your question, people who have already had mumps are extremely unlikely to get mumps again since having it once usually results in lifelong immunity. The small percentage of those who do become reinfected are likely to experience milder illness. Additionally, it’s good to note that if a person had suspected that they had mumps but was never diagnosed by a health care provider, they are not considered immune. In that case, getting the vaccine is still recommended.

If you’ve had mumps before, but are experiencing pain or swelling of your salivary glands again, it is possible that it could be caused by a viral or bacterial infection. More specifically, bacterial infections may be a result of poor oral hygiene, smoking, chronic illness, and blockage of the salivary ducts. Additional symptoms of a salivary gland infection may include a foul taste in your mouth, dry mouth, difficulty opening your mouth, and fever. Some infections that affect the salivary glands resolve on their own or with treatment. As far as options for self-care are concerned, keeping up with your oral health (i.e. brushing, rinsing, flossing, and not smoking), drinking water to increase flow of saliva, and using a warm compress might help.

However, if you have these types of symptoms, it might be best to make a visit to a health care provider. Seeking immediate medical attention is recommended if you have a high fever and/or difficulty swallowing or breathing.

Hope this helps!

Alice!

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