Mumps [1]

(1) Dear Alice,
What are the symptoms of mumps?

(2) Dear Alice,
Can mumps kill you?

Answer

Dear Reader(s),

Mumps is a virus that primarily infects particular salivary glands (the parotid glands) located near the ears. The most well-known symptom of mumps is swelling near the parotid glands that can cause the cheeks to puff out. The name “mumps” was given to the infection because of these lumps and bumps on the cheeks. Other symptoms of mumps are often very rare or mild, but can include: pain near the parotid salivary glands, fever, headache, fatigue, weakness, and loss of appetite. Some of these symptoms are similarly experienced with other diseases. If you develop symptoms, a wise first step is to get an official diagnosis (more on this later). The good news is that cases of mumps have been significantly reduced in the United States because of childhood vaccines. The combined MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine is typically given in two separate doses before children enter school. For those receiving both doses, the effectiveness of preventing mumps is about 90 percent. If someone only gets the first dose, effectiveness drops to 78 percent. If you have not yet received the vaccination, it’s a great idea to schedule an appointment with a health care provider.

That said, mumps is very contagious, particularly within the first week of symptoms. The infection can be spread through saliva, mucous, or phlegm from the lungs. To confirm a mumps case, a viral culture or a blood test may be administered to see whether antibodies are present (signaling that the body is currently fighting off an infection). Patients with confirmed mumps infections will often be advised to avoid contact with others during the first five to seven days after diagnosis. Patience and rest are really the only treatments for viral infections like mumps. Non-prescription pain relievers (such as acetaminophen) and cold compresses can help soothe discomfort while your body recovers, which tends to be about two weeks.

There are some very rare, more serious complications associated with the inflammation caused by mumps, including swelling in the testicles, pancreas, ovaries, breasts, and brain.
Fatality is extremely rare and linked to mumps-associated encephalitis (swelling of the brain). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also note that there have been no reported deaths associated with any mumps outbreak in recent years. Hearing loss has also resulted in some of the more severe mumps infections.

Again, for anyone concerned about signs of mumps, it’s a good idea to schedule an appointment to see your health care provider. Limiting your interactions with others will help prevent the spread of infection until you see a medical professional. It may also prove helpful to keep a symptoms journal, noting when specific symptoms started, if they are improving or worsening, and if you had any known exposure to someone diagnosed with mumps.

Hope this helps you stay healthy!

Alice!

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