

Mumps Concern

Recently in the news it has been reported an outbreak of mumps in Iowa and the Midwest. A mumps outbreak has been documented in Iowa this past December 2005, along with cases being reported in nearby states of Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota and South Dakota. The incidence of mumps has declined since the vaccine was introduced in the 1967, but occasionally outbreaks occur with unknown reason. To date, 1,100 cases of mumps have been reported when normally less than 300 cases a year are reported in the United States. The mumps generally affect college age students or young adults. It is spread when there are a lot of people living within close proximity.

Mumps is a highly contagious viral infection known as infectious parotitis and is characterized by swelling and tenderness along the jaw, or in front of or below the ears, with signs and symptoms that may include a cough or cold like symptoms consisting of headache, fever, muscle aching and loss of appetite. It is spread easily from person to person through coughing or sneezing. The incubation period can last from 16-18 days after infection, but range from 12-25 days. The communicability starts from three days before symptoms appear to approximately nine days after the start of symptoms. If you have previously been diagnosed with the mumps or have been vaccinated, you are considered immune to the disease. You can have a blood titer drawn to detect mumps antibodies present to confirm immunity if in doubt.

With the recent outbreak of mumps, it has been theorized that a traveler from England brought the virus to the United States. This is suspected because the CDC confirmed the mumps virus in Iowa to be the same strain as what occurred in the United Kingdom. That outbreak infected about 70,000 people. Due to the ease of travel, the virus will theoretically be able to spread quickly to other parts of the United States.

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As apart of childhood immunizations, it is recommended that a child receives 2 measles, mumps and rubella, (MMR) vaccines. The first MMR dose is given at 12 to 15 months of age and the second dose given around 4 to 6 years of age or at least 28 days between the two shots. The first vaccine is only about 80 percent to 85 percent effective, boosting the effectiveness to about 90 percent after receiving the second dose of vaccine. If you are unsure about your vaccination status, consult with your health care provider for advice.

Immunization against the disease is important because complications may arise if the disease is acquired. In rare instances, meningitis, encephalitis, hearing loss, inflammation of the testicles with possible sterility and also possible inflammation of the ovaries in females could develop as a result of the disease. It is also important to note that during the first trimester of pregnancy, it may increase the risk of miscarriage if mumps are contracted.

It has been noted that it is possible to have had the mumps and not know it. Many people don't show symptoms for 2 to 3 weeks. During this time period, one can be unaware they are spreading the virus. Surfaces of items can also spread the virus to others if someone is sick and touches a surface or object without washing their hands then another person comes in contact the same surface and rubs their eyes or nose, thus becoming exposed to the virus. This is called a fomite transmission. One out of every five people infected will have no symptoms and others only may have a slight fever.

If you are exhibiting mumps symptoms and you need to seek medical attention, call your doctor ahead of time and let them know your suspicions so you possibly won't have to wait in the waiting area a long time and expose others to the virus. Stay at home from school, work or day care centers, so you don't spread it to others. To reduce the transmission of the virus stay home seven to nine days after the onset of symptoms or till you feel better, which ever is the longest. Mumps can only be treated with support measures.

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Check with your health care provider and see if you are protected from measles, mumps and rubella. If not, consider getting vaccinated. Remember that washing your hands frequently can aid in halting the spread of disease. As always, if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov