

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

MONONUCLEOSIS

Infectious mononucleosis is a viral disease that affects certain blood cells. It is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), which is a member of the herpesvirus family and one of the most common human viruses.

Symptoms

Symptoms appear from 4-6 weeks after exposure and include:

- Fatigue
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Swollen glands
- Symptoms of infectious mononucleosis are fever, sore throat, and swollen lymph glands. Sometimes, a swollen spleen or liver involvement may develop. Heart problems or involvement of the brain occur only rarely, and infectious mononucleosis is almost never fatal.
- Although the symptoms usually resolve in 1 or 2 months, the virus remains dormant (asleep) in a few cells in the throat and blood for the rest of the person's life. Periodically, the virus can reactivate and the person may be contagious again. Usually, people have no symptoms when the virus reactivates.

Transmission

- EBV is spread by intimate contact with the saliva (found in the mouth) of an infected person (by kissing or sharing objects that go in the mouth). Transmission through the air or blood does not normally occur.
- Persons with infectious mononucleosis may be able to spread the infection to others for a period of weeks. However, many healthy people can carry and spread the virus intermittently for life. These people are usually the primary source of infection.
- As many as 95% of adults have been infected by the time they reach age 40. However, very few develop symptoms. Symptoms are more likely to be recognized in high school and college students.

Treatment

- In most cases of mononucleosis, the clinical diagnosis can be made from the characteristic symptoms. Usually, laboratory blood tests can confirm the diagnosis.
- No treatment other than rest is needed in the vast majority of cases. Symptoms related to infectious mononucleosis caused by EBV infection seldom last for more than 4 months. When such an illness lasts more than 6 months, a doctor should investigate further to rule out other problems. Infected persons may return to classes or work when they feel well enough to do so.

Prevention

- Avoid activities involving the transfer of body fluids (commonly saliva) with someone who is currently or recently infected with the disease.
- At present, there is no vaccine available to prevent mononucleosis.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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