

Mononucleosis

What is mononucleosis?

Mononucleosis, also known as infectious mononucleosis or mono, is an acute viral disease most commonly caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV).

Who gets infectious mononucleosis?

While most people are infected with the Epstein-Barr virus sometime in their lives as few as 50% will develop the symptoms of mononucleosis. Many people, especially infants and young children, only exhibit mild symptoms. In developed countries such as the United States, the age of first exposure may be delayed until older childhood or young adulthood, when symptoms are more likely to be worse. This is why many cases appear in high school and college-age students.

How is mononucleosis spread?

The virus that causes infectious mononucleosis is spread by person-to-person contact through saliva, such as by sharing cups or utensils, on hands, or by kissing. This is the reason it is often called “the kissing disease.”

How long does it take for someone who was exposed to show symptoms?

Symptoms generally appear 4 to 6 weeks after exposure.

What are the symptoms of infectious mononucleosis?

Symptoms may include fever, sore throat, swollen glands, and fatigue. In some patients the spleen and liver may become enlarged.

When and for how long is a person able to spread mononucleosis?

The EBV virus is shed in saliva during the illness and for up to a year after infection. It is not known exactly how long a person is able to spread the infection to others, however.

How long are people with mononucleosis usually sick for? It takes several weeks for most people to recover, but it may take some people months to regain their normal level of activity.

What is the treatment for infectious mononucleosis?

There is not treatment for mononucleosis other than rest. In the vast number of cases this is all that is needed.

Are there any complications with mononucleosis?

There is a small risk of rupture of the spleen due to contact sports or heavy lifting while ill, so these activities should be avoided until the patient is cleared by a doctor.

Is there a vaccine for mononucleosis?

Not at this time.

For specific concerns about mononucleosis, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Communicable Disease Control Section at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov.