



Mononucleosis

What is Mononucleosis?

Mononucleosis is an infectious, widespread viral disease caused primarily by the Epstein-Barr virus (79%) which is a member of the herpes virus family or because of an acute cytomegalovirus infection (21%). Mononucleosis infects B-lymphocytes (a type of white blood cell). Most people are exposed to the virus as children, when the disease produces no noticeable symptoms or only flu-like symptoms. This disease is more observable and more common in adolescents and young adults.

Symptoms of Mononucleosis

Mononucleosis may appear four to six weeks after exposure. The onset may be sudden, but often several days of chills, sweats, feverish sensations, loss of appetite and an overall sense of feeling unwell may be present before more specific symptoms develop. Children often do not show any symptoms. In adolescents and young adults, the symptoms may include:

- Fever that frequently peaks in the afternoon
- Sore throat
- Swollen glands (especially in the back of the neck)
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Liver or spleen may become enlarged

Older adults are less likely to have a sore throat or swollen glands, but more likely to have enlargement of the liver and jaundice.

Recovery usually takes several weeks but may take up to four months.

Once the acute symptoms of an initial infection disappear, they will not return. But once infected, the person carries the virus for the rest of his or her life. Independent infections of mononucleosis may be contracted many times, regardless of whether the person is already carrying the dormant virus.

Mononucleosis spreads

Mononucleosis is spread from person-to-person through saliva contact. The virus can spread through kissing, sharing drinks or utensils, or touching contaminated hands or toys. It can also be spread through a blood transfusion. The most contagious period lasts about six weeks after the beginning of symptoms.

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca

Complications with Mononucleosis

Sometimes the spleen enlarges and is at risk of tearing. The affected person should avoid contact sports and heavy lifting to protect the spleen from rupturing or breaking open. A sudden pain in the upper left abdomen could indicate that the spleen is rupturing and requires immediate medical attention.

Preventing Mononucleosis

There is no vaccine to prevent mononucleosis. The most effective method of preventing mononucleosis is frequent hand washing and to avoid sharing items such as cups, glasses and utensils with an infected person.

Treating Mononucleosis

There is no treatment. Rest and drinking plenty of fluids is recommended during the acute phase of the illness. Throat lozenges may help a sore throat. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen may be given for general discomfort or fever. If any illness lasts for more than six months, the person should seek medical attention.

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