

Mumps:

What you need to know

What is mumps?

Mumps is a contagious viral infection caused by the mumps virus. Since the introduction of the mumps vaccine in Canada in 1969, and the success of immunization programs ever since, cases of mumps in Canada have decreased by more than **99%**. But mumps cases and outbreaks continue to occur in Canada and mumps remains endemic in many countries worldwide (please see box titled [What does endemic mean?](#)).

What does endemic mean?

A disease is considered endemic within a specific geographic region or group of people when it is:

- consistently present, and
- predictable (i.e., there is typically an expected/stable number of people that will catch the disease within a specific timeframe).

For example, the common cold is considered endemic in Canada as the viruses that cause the common cold are present all year long (though they circulate the most in the fall and winter months), and we typically have a good idea of how many people will catch the common cold at different points in the year (predictable). There is no vaccine for the common cold.

What are the symptoms?

While some people who have mumps will not have symptoms or will have only very mild symptoms, the most common symptom of mumps is the **swelling of the salivary glands**. These glands are located just under the ears, and when they become inflamed, they can bulge and lead to tenderness in the jaw, as well as pain while eating. Other symptoms can include:

- fever,
- headache,
- tiredness,
- sore muscles,
- dry mouth, and
- loss of appetite.



In severe cases, mumps can lead to **meningitis** (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) and **encephalitis** (inflammation of the brain). **Rarely**, both of these conditions can lead to **permanent neurological problems**, such as seizures and paralysis. Permanent deafness is also a potential side effect of mumps infection. However, this is also **rare**.

Mumps can also lead to inflammation of the testicles (orchitis) and ovaries (oophoritis). **In rare cases**, this inflammation can lead to infertility (the inability to have children).

Who is at risk?

While **anyone** can catch mumps, people who have weakened immune systems (who are immunocompromised) and/or who have chronic health conditions tend to experience more severe mumps infections.

In recent years in Canada, the number of mumps cases seen in people over the age of 20 has increased, and the majority of mumps cases have been seen in people 15 to 39 years of age who were unimmunized or under-immunized.

How is it spread?

The mumps virus enters the body through the mouth or nose. Mumps is spread:

1. through close contact with others (e.g., coughing or sneezing next to someone, or sharing personal items such as drinks)
2. through coming into direct contact with an infected person's mucus or spit and then getting these fluids in your nose or mouth



Who should be immunized?

- children and adolescents according to the childhood immunization schedule in their province/territory
- adults born in or after 1970 who **have not been** immunized against mumps or who **do not have** laboratory-confirmed immunity to mumps
 - It is assumed that most adults born before 1970 have already had mumps, and therefore most likely already have immunity to the disease.
- healthcare workers, military personnel, and people planning to travel outside of Canada who **have not been** immunized against mumps or who **do not have** laboratory-confirmed immunity to mumps, regardless of birth year

Publicly funded immunization schedules for mumps may vary between provinces and territories.

While the mumps vaccine is highly effective, it is still possible for some vaccinated people to get mumps. However, the infection is usually **milder** in people who received the mumps vaccine, and people who were vaccinated are **less likely** to experience severe disease and associated complications (i.e., meningitis, permanent deafness, etc.).

Are you protected against mumps?

Mumps vaccines are safe and the most effective way to protect against mumps infection.

The mumps vaccine is combined with other vaccines – mainly the measles, rubella, and varicella (chickenpox) vaccines. Together, they make the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine or the measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella (MMRV) vaccine. With the MMR or MMRV vaccine, you get protection against multiple diseases in one shot.



Talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or local public health office about getting yourself and your child immunized against mumps.

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