

MONONUCLEOSIS (MONO)

Mono is a viral disease caused most often (90 percent of the time) by a virus called: "Epstein - Barr Virus" (EBV) or less frequently (10 percent of all cases) by a virus called "CMV." With CMV mononucleosis symptoms are usually mild. For the sake of simplifying this fact sheet, we will be discussing EBV mononucleosis only.

Sore throat occurs during the first week of illness and is present in more than 80 percent of cases. Fever, with temperature elevations of 102 F or higher, lasts for about 10 days and then falls gradually over an additional 7-10 days. In some patients, low-grade fever and malaise (general feeling of illness) may last for several weeks to months after the acute illness. Gradual development of generalized enlarged lymph nodes is common. About one half of those infected will develop an enlarged spleen. Other less common and infrequent symptoms include enlarged and tender liver, rash, and inflammation of the lungs. The incubation period (time between when a person is exposed to someone who is infected and when they develop symptoms) is four to six weeks.

Most persons infected in infancy and early childhood have no symptoms at all or may only have a mild cold or cough. Thirty to forty percent of children by age six have antibodies (showing past infection) to EBV. Acute cases of mononucleosis are frequently seen among older children, teens, and young adults.

The virus is transmitted primarily by saliva, although some infections have also been transmitted by blood transfusion. Young children may be infected by saliva on the hands of caregivers or on toys which are put in the mouth. Among teens and young adults, kissing is a common mechanism for spread or through sharing a common drinking vessel or cigarette. Prolonged presence of the virus in the saliva of an infected person may persist for a year after infection.

Additional Information:

There is no specific treatment for mono. The physician may recommend bed rest during the acute stage.

Persons who are infectious (able to spread the virus to others) are not routinely excluded from school or work due to the long period of infectiousness involved and the apparent low rate of communicability.

Diagnosis is made by laboratory tests and examination by a physician.

There is presently no vaccine available to prevent EBV infection.

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