

Information Sheet on Infectious Mononucleosis (“Mono”)

Caused by the Epstein-Barr virus

Who gets this infection?

Infection frequently is contracted early in life. Only those who did not get this infection as young children are susceptible to getting this infection when they are adolescents or older. In the United States 95% of adults have already had Mononucleosis by the age of 40 years.

What are the symptoms of getting this infection?

In Children: Most children who become infected have *no symptoms at all!* For those children who get some symptoms, they will get a mild brief illness with sore throat and swollen lymph glands. Most of us who have had the infection could not have distinguished Infectious Mononucleosis from a mild cold.

In Adolescents and Adults: When infection occurs during adolescence or young adulthood, it causes symptoms only 35% to 50% of the time. Symptoms at this age may be more pronounced and last longer than during childhood. The symptoms are fever, sore throat, and swollen lymph glands. Sometimes, a swollen spleen or liver involvement may develop. The symptoms of infectious mononucleosis can last as long as 1 or 2 months. However, the virus can stay around in very small quantities in the person’s throat and blood for the rest of the person's life. Even if the virus becomes active again in this person, this occurs without symptoms of illness.

How is the virus transmitted from one person to another?

The virus can remain in the infected person’s throat long after the infection is over. The virus can be transmitted from one person to another through direct contact with saliva. Close personal contact usually is required for transmission of this disease. Transmission of this virus through the air or blood does not normally occur. It is also transmitted occasionally by blood transfusion.

What kind of control measures should be taken if a student or adult in school has Infectious Mononucleosis?

No special precautions or isolation procedures are recommended, since the virus is also found frequently in the saliva of healthy people. In fact, many healthy people can carry and spread the virus intermittently for life. These people are usually the primary reservoir for person-to-person transmission. For this reason, transmission of the virus is almost impossible to prevent.

How do doctors usually treat the student with Infectious Mononucleosis?

There is no specific treatment for infectious mononucleosis, other than treating the symptoms (like rest, medication for fever, etc.). No antiviral drugs or vaccines are available. Some physicians prescribe oral steroids to control the swelling of the throat and tonsils, but its use is controversial. If a student’s spleen is large, contact sports should be avoided until the spleen is smaller once again.