



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Infectious Mononucleosis

What is infectious mononucleosis?

Infectious mononucleosis is a viral illness caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), a member of the herpesvirus family. It is one of the most common human viruses. Although many people are exposed to the virus at some point in their lives, very few actually develop symptoms. When infection occurs during adolescence or young adulthood, it causes infectious mononucleosis 35% to 50% of the time.

How do you get it?

Mononucleosis is transmitted by close personal contact involving direct exposure to saliva. Young children may be infected by saliva on the hands of nurses and other attendants and on toys, or by pre-chewing of baby food by the mother, a practice in some countries. Kissing facilitates spread among young adults. Spread may also occur via blood transfusions.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms include fever, sore throat, and fatigue that may extend from one to several weeks or more. The lymph nodes in the neck may be enlarged and tender. A long-lasting form of the disease has been suggested as a possible cause of chronic fatigue syndrome. This disease is rarely fatal.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms begin 4 to 6 weeks after infection with the virus.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for the viral illness.

For how long is a person contagious?

The virus can be found in saliva and throat secretions for a year or more after the initial infection. Infected individuals may thereafter transmit the virus to others for an extended period.

How can you keep from getting it?

Avoid exposure to saliva and nasal secretions from persons infected with the disease.

Do not share items of personal hygiene such as toothbrushes and facial tissues used by someone with infectious mononucleosis.

Practice good hygiene by washing your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/ebv.htm>