Mumps

This sheet is about having mumps in pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information is based on published research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is mumps?

Mumps is a viral infection caused by a virus called Orthorubulavirus parotitidis (sometimes also simply called the mumps virus).

What are the symptoms of mumps?

Common signs of mumps are puffy cheeks and a tender, swollen jaw. This is caused by swollen salivary glands. Your salivary glands make saliva to help you swallow and digest food. This swelling can happen on 1 or both sides of the lower face/jaw and can last for up to 10 days.

Other symptoms of mumps can begin a few days before the swelling. Other symptoms include fever, headache, earache, muscle aches, tiredness, and loss of appetite.

Some people who get mumps might have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. People without symptoms can still spread the mumps virus to others.

Some people can develop other health problems, including orchitis (inflammation of the testicles) or oophoritis (inflammation of the ovaries), encephalitis (infection in the brain), meningitis (infection in the covering of the brain or spinal cord), or hearing loss.

For most people, symptoms of mumps usually start 16 to 18 days after being exposed to the mumps virus, but a range of 12 to 25 days has been reported.

How do you get mumps?

Mumps is very contagious. People can spread the virus before they start to have symptoms.

The mumps virus spreads from person to person after direct contact with saliva or respiratory droplets. Direct contact can also happen from touching objects (such as doorknobs) that have saliva or respiratory droplets from an infected person on them.

How can I reduce my chances of getting mumps?

The best way to protect yourself against mumps is to be vaccinated. MotherToBaby has a sheet on the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine here: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/measles-mumps-and-rubella-mmr-vaccine/. Since live vaccines (like MMR) should not be given during pregnancy, it's important to make sure you are up to date with vaccination before getting pregnant or after delivery.

Other ways to reduce your chances of getting mumps are to

- avoid others who are sick with the illness,
- avoid crowded areas if a mumps outbreak is taking place near you
- wash your hands well with soap and water,
- encourage other people living in the home to be vaccinated.

I have mumps. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?
There are some reports that a mumps infection can cause inflammation in the ovaries (oophoritis). Ovaries are the organs where eggs are stored and released. Oophoritis might make it harder to get pregnant.

Does having mumps increase the chance of miscarriage?
This has not been well-studied. Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Human case reports have suggested that infection with mumps during pregnancy might increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does having mumps increase the chance of birth defects?
Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like getting mumps might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Having mumps is not expected to increase the chance of birth defects.

Fever is a possible symptom of mumps. A high fever in the first trimester can increase the chance of certain birth defects. Acetaminophen has been recommended to reduce fever in pregnancy. If you get sick with mumps and develop a fever, talk with your healthcare provider to confirm if taking acetaminophen is okay for you. For more information about fever and acetaminophen, see the MotherToBaby fact sheets https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hyperthermia-pregnancy/ and https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/acetaminophen-pregnancy/.

Does having mumps increase the chance of other pregnancy related problems?
This is not well-studied. Human case reports have suggested that having mumps during pregnancy might increase the chance of stillbirth (fetal death after 20 weeks). A mumps infection near the time of delivery might also increase the chance of the baby being born with the infection, although this is thought to be rare.

Does having mumps in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?
It is not known if having mumps in pregnancy increases the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while I have mumps:
The mumps virus has been found in breastmilk, but it is not known if mumps can be spread to a baby through breast milk. If you have mumps, talk to your healthcare provider about the best ways to prevent the spread of illness to your breastfed baby. If you suspect that your baby has any symptoms of mumps, contact the child's healthcare provider right away. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man has mumps, can it affect his fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?
If a man has mumps he can pass the virus to a pregnant woman through close contact. Males who have orchitis (inflammation of the testicles, a side effect of mumps in some males) can have lower fertility (ability to make healthy sperm). This lower fertility is usually temporary, but there are some reports of it lasting. One study did not find an increased chance for birth defects in the offspring of men who had mumps orchitis. In general, exposures that men have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.

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