

What is infectious mononucleosis?

Infectious mononucleosis is a viral illness caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). Epstein-Barr virus is a member of the herpes virus family and one of the most common human viruses. The virus occurs worldwide, and most people become infected with EBV sometime during their lives. In the United States, as many as 95% of adults between 35 and 40 years of age have been infected. Anyone can be infected with the EBV, but very few develop illness. In the United States, illness usually occurs in older children, high school and college students. When infection with EBV occurs during adolescence or young adulthood, it causes infectious mononucleosis 35% to 50% of the time.

What are the symptoms of infectious mononucleosis?

Symptoms of illness include fever, sore throat, swollen glands and a feeling of tiredness which usually last for several weeks, but can persist for a few months. Very young children may not develop any symptoms after being infected or have other symptoms indistinguishable from the mild, brief illnesses of childhood.

How soon do symptoms appear?

If a person develops symptoms, they usually appear four to six weeks after infection with the virus.

How is the virus spread?

The virus is spread from person to person by saliva (on hands or toys, or by kissing) and rarely through the air or blood. Both ill and non-ill persons can spread the virus.

How long is a person able to spread the virus?

The virus is carried in the throat and can be spread during the illness and for as long as a year after illness. Some people can carry and spread the virus off and on throughout their lifetime. For this reason, transmission of the virus is almost impossible to prevent.

How do I know if I'm infected with mononucleosis?

If you are ill, your healthcare provider will evaluate your symptoms and may draw blood to test for infectious mononucleosis.

What is the treatment for infectious mononucleosis?

There is no specific treatment for infectious mononucleosis, other than treating the symptoms. No antiviral drugs or vaccines are available. Your healthcare provider may prescribe a five day course of steroids to control the swelling of the throat and tonsils.

Can a person get infectious mononucleosis again?

After a person is infected with the virus, it remains in their bodies for the rest of their life. Sometimes the virus can reactivate but usually occurs without symptoms of illness.

What can a person do to stop the spread of EBV?

Avoid contact with the body fluids (commonly saliva) of someone who is infected with the virus. Good hygiene is the most effective way to protect yourself from being infected. Avoid sharing utensils or drinking beverages from a common container with infected individuals.

