

Mumps: Q&As

What is mumps?

Mumps is a virus that can make children and adults very sick. It is highly infectious and can spread quickly and easily through saliva and mucus while talking, sneezing, coughing and during close contact.

If you have not been vaccinated or had the disease previously, you may catch mumps just by being within a metre of someone who has it, or by touching a surface (e.g. a keyboard) or other object (e.g. a used tissue) that has been infected with the virus.

How serious is mumps?

Mumps is not as infectious as measles but it is still easy to catch. While it can be a mild illness, it can lead to serious complications for some people.

Pregnant women who are not immune have a small risk of miscarriage in the first three months, and men and adolescent boys can experience pain and swelling in their testicles; in rare cases this can result in reduced fertility. Mumps can lead to inflammation of the brain lining (meningitis) or, rarely, the brain (encephalitis). Although uncommon, females can experience ovarian inflammation, and mumps can cause hearing loss.

What are the symptoms of mumps?

Early symptoms of mumps include fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness and loss of appetite. The salivary glands on one or both sides of the face, cheeks or jaw may become swollen and sore after two days.

It can take from 12 to 25 days for someone who has caught mumps to start showing symptoms. And you can have mumps and spread it to others *before* you feel sick or show any symptoms.

Some people with mumps will not have any symptoms (15-20%), and this is more common in adults than in children. Nevertheless, adults who do have symptoms are more likely to have serious complications than children.

What should I do if I think I or a family member has mumps?

If you think you or a family member has mumps, it's important to **see a doctor**. But ring before you go to avoid infecting others in the waiting area. You can also call **Healthline for free health advice: 0800 611 116**. Healthline operates 24 hours, seven days a week, and has a translator service available.

If you catch mumps, you should stay at home (in isolation) for five days after your swelling appears. This allows you to recover, and also means you won't spread the illness. **You can spread mumps to other people from two days before the swelling starts, the day of the swelling and then five days after – eight days in total.**

There is advice on the ARPHS website - [Information for people with suspected mumps](#) - about who you need to tell. This includes your workplace, close family and any friends you've been close to (within a metre) during the time you were infectious (two days before the swelling onset, the first day of swelling and five days after).

It's especially important to tell anyone you've been close to who works in education or health, or who goes to preschool, school or university. Children and adults may need to stay home if they are not immune.

If you have family and friends who want more information, you can direct them to the [Information for people who have been in contact with mumps](#) fact sheet on the ARPHS website.

I have been close to someone with mumps, what do I do?

If you're immune...

If you have been exposed to the mumps virus, check whether you are immune (i.e. you've previously been vaccinated with the measles mumps and rubella [MMR] vaccine or have had the virus before). Ask your doctor or look in your Well Child Tamariki Ora Health Book or Plunket book for your vaccination records. If you've been vaccinated, there's a small chance your immunity has declined over time, so still keep an eye out for symptoms and seek medical advice if you feel unwell. Anyone born before 1 January 1982 is considered to be immune.

If you're not immune...

If you (or your child) are not immune, you may be developing mumps; watch for symptoms for the next 25 days and get one MMR vaccination immediately.

People aged five years and older who have had one MMR should get a second MMR to reduce the chance of developing the disease from further exposures. Children aged six months to four years old should catch up on any missed MMR vaccinations, but otherwise keep to the MMR schedule. During the current measles outbreak in Auckland, that means getting vaccinated at six months, one year and four years old.

If you have proof of at least one MMR vaccination, you can return to work, school or preschool if you remain well. But if you work in healthcare, you need to have previously had two MMR vaccines (i.e. before you were exposed to the virus) to avoid quarantine.

Non-immune people who have been exposed to mumps and who cannot, or choose not to, be vaccinated are advised to go into quarantine at home. Quarantine means staying at home and not going to work, school, preschool or out into the community. The quarantine period starts 12 days after your first exposure to the person with mumps while they were infectious, and lasts until 25 days after your last exposure. The [quarantine calculator](#) on the ARPHS website will help you work this out.

I've been exposed to mumps, should I get vaccinated?

Anyone who has been in [close contact](#) with a person confirmed with mumps is a priority for MMR vaccination. Please see your doctor or student health service and get vaccinated with MMR immediately if you do not have evidence of two previous MMR doses and are older than four years. Children aged six months to four years old should catch up on any missed MMR vaccinations, but otherwise keep to the MMR schedule. During the current measles outbreak in Auckland, that means getting vaccinated at six months, one year and four years old.

Getting vaccinated as soon as possible will reduce the chance of developing the disease if you get exposed to the virus again. MMR vaccination will also help protect you against [measles](#) (more contagious than mumps with very serious complications) and [rubella](#), which can harm the unborn child in pregnancy.

How long will it be before I know if I've caught mumps?

It can take from 12 up to 25 days for someone who has caught mumps to start showing symptoms. [If you have been near someone with mumps](#), check you are immune.

What does being in quarantine mean?

Being in [quarantine](#) means you or your child should stay home and not use public transport or visit neighbours, friends or family (and they should not visit you).

Please do not go to work, preschool, school, university or technical institutes. Do not go to church or other places of worship, social or sports events, supermarkets, markets, cafés or takeaway shops.

To work out how long you may need to stay in quarantine, use the [quarantine calculator](#) on the Auckland Regional Public Health Service website.

Who needs to go into quarantine?

Any close contacts of mumps that have not previously had a Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine can return to school, their early learning service or work if they are vaccinated immediately. The exception is babies aged six to 11 months, who should be given MMR0, **but remain in quarantine. Quarantine is also advised for:**

- Non-immune pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems (e.g. due to illness or medication).
- Healthcare workers who have not previously (i.e. prior to exposure) had two MMR vaccines.
- Close contacts who can't, or choose not to, be vaccinated with at least one MMR.

There is a [Mumps Quarantine Calculator](#) – and [other resources](#) - available on the mumps page of Auckland Regional Public Health Service's website.

My employee has mumps – what do I do?

People diagnosed with confirmed mumps should stay at home (isolation) until they are no longer infectious. You are infectious with mumps from two days before swelling starts in the face, neck or jaw, the day the swelling starts, and for five days after.

People who have been exposed to mumps can continue to go to work if they have been vaccinated with at least one MMR. The only exception is healthcare workers, who need to have had two MMR vaccines before they were exposed to mumps to avoid quarantine. Those not immune or with no evidence of MMR vaccination will have to stay away from work until they have had one MMR.

There is a [Mumps in the workplace](#) guide on the Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) website, or workplace managers can ring ARPHS for information and advice. You, and your staff, can also call **Healthline for free health advice: 0800 611 116**. Healthline operates 24/7 and has a translator service available.

I'm not sure if I've been vaccinated. What should I do?

Ask your doctor or look in your Well Child Tamariki Ora Health Book or Plunket book. If you can't find your records, vaccination is recommended. If you were born before 1 January 1982, you are considered immune.

How can I protect myself and my family against mumps?

The best protection against mumps is to be vaccinated with the measles, mumps and rubella ([MMR vaccine](#)). Two doses of MMR will protect around 85 percent of people.

Currently in Auckland, the MMR vaccine is routinely given to children at six months old because of the measles outbreak, and then again at 12 months and four years old. It's important that children get vaccinated on time according to this schedule.

If you have no record of being immunised with MMR, it's recommended that you get an MMR vaccination. It takes about two weeks for a person to become fully immune after being vaccinated. In the current measles

outbreak, the MMR is being prioritised for more vulnerable and high risk groups of people - your doctor or nurse can advise you about the latest updates.

If you were born before 1 January 1982 (either in New Zealand or overseas) you are likely to have had the disease as a child and therefore already be immune.

Who is at risk of mumps?

Anyone who is not immune to the disease and comes into close contact with someone while they are infectious with mumps may catch the illness. So far for 2019, most cases have been in people aged 15 to 39 years old who had not been vaccinated with the MMR vaccine.

I'm pregnant. Am I at risk?

We suggest that you check your immunity by asking your doctor for your vaccination records, or looking in your Well Child Tamariki Ora Health Book or Plunket Book if you or your parents have this.

If you are pregnant and **not immune** to mumps, and you have been exposed to the virus, you should talk to your lead maternity carer as soon as possible. There is a very small increased risk of miscarriage in your first three months.

Where can I seek advice or find out more about mumps?

Free phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 or visit:

- The Ministry of Health website – www.health.govt.nz
- The Auckland Regional Public Health Service website – www.arphs.health.nz
- The Immunisation Advisory Centre website – www.immune.org.nz (or free phone 0800 466 863)