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Mononucleosis

What is "mono"?

Infectious mononucleosis, commonly called "mono," is a disease caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). EBV is one of the most common viruses worldwide. Most people are exposed to EBV as children, but the infection often goes unnoticed because they experience minimal symptoms. Most people have been exposed to EBV by the age of 35 and have developed immunity. However, when EBV infection occurs during late adolescence or early adulthood, there is a 35% to 50% chance of developing mono.

Is it common?

As many as 95% of adults in the U.S. become infected with EBV at some point in their lives. For those that develop mono, the highest incidence occurs in people between the ages of 15 and 24.

How is it transmitted?

EBV is transmitted through direct contact with virus-infected saliva. Intimate kissing or sharing drinking glasses are the most common routes of transmission. People with mono are most likely to transmit it just prior to feeling ill. This is called asymptomatic shedding and accounts for most of the disease's transmission.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of mono may include one or more of the following:

- Persistent "tired all over" feeling
- Sore throat and tonsils
- Swollen lymph glands
- Fever
- Headache
- Enlarged spleen and liver
- Occasionally, a skin rash or jaundice (yellow tint to the skin)

How long after exposure to EBV will the symptoms appear?

If symptoms appear, it typically takes up to 4 - 6 weeks after being infected.

How is it diagnosed?

Mono is diagnosed based on the presence of fever, sore throat, and swollen lymph glands. Your medical provider will also request lab tests to confirm the diagnosis. The tests may include blood tests. Be aware that you may need to have symptoms for a week or more before lab tests can identify the virus.

How is it treated?

Because mono is a virus, there are no specific cures or treatments. To help relieve symptoms, you should get plenty of rest, drink plenty of fluids, take an over-the-counter pain reliever such as ibuprofen as needed, and gargle with salt water to relieve a sore throat. Because mono can affect the liver, most providers recommend avoiding the use of acetaminophen. It is also recommended that you abstain from alcohol while ill, and in some cases for up to 3 months after diagnosis. And because your spleen can become enlarged, it is very important to protect it from rupturing. Strenuous exercise, especially contact sports, must be avoided for 3 weeks after diagnosis.

How long will it take to get better?

Recovery may be quicker than you think. Symptoms will ease within 10 days, but don't expect to return to your normal activities for 2 to 3 weeks. 85% of all people with mono are well in 2 weeks and 90% are well in 4 weeks. It is rare for a student to drop out of school because of mono. A few cases of mono are severe enough to interfere with academic work, but these are the exception, not the rule. If you continue to experience symptoms beyond 6 weeks, talk with your medical provider. Contact your provider sooner for worsening signs or symptoms.

Is it contagious?

Most people have been exposed to the EBV at some point in their life and so are not at risk of developing mono. Because of this, it is not recommended that people with mono isolate themselves from others. Roommates rarely get mono from each other. Avoiding contact with the saliva of an infected person for about 1 month after he/she becomes ill is recommended.

Can I make an appointment with Health Services?

If you have concerns about mono, please call to speak with one of our nursing staff or make an appointment here ([link to appointments](#))

Related Links

For more information on mono, check out the CDC ([link](https://www.cdc.gov/epstein-barr/about-mono.html)) <https://www.cdc.gov/epstein-barr/about-mono.html>