

Mumps is a contagious disease that is caused by a virus, but it can be prevented by a vaccine given routinely to children.

Before the U.S. mumps vaccination program started in 1967, mumps was a universal childhood disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since the vaccine era, the number of mumps cases across the nation has decreased by more than 99 percent. However, mumps outbreaks can still occur in highly vaccinated communities in the U.S. and the Caribbean, particularly in close-contact settings such as schools, colleges and camps. Florida and the Caribbean have seen mumps cases among children and adults during 2017. Fortunately, high vaccination coverage helps to limit the size, duration and spread of mumps outbreaks.

Mumps spreads through droplets of saliva or mucus from the mouth, nose or throat when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or on items touched by a person carrying the virus. Mumps symptoms typically begin with fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness and loss of appetite. Subsequently, most people will have swelling of their salivary glands. This is what causes the puffy cheeks and a tender, swollen jaw. If untreated, mumps can cause serious complications such as swelling of the brain (encephalitis), swelling of the tissue covering the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and deafness.

Luckily, the disease can be prevented with the MMR vaccine, which protects against measles, mumps and rubella. The CDC recommends children get two doses of MMR vaccine, starting with the first dose at 12 to 15 months of age, and the second dose at 4 to 6 years of age. Teens and adults should also be up to date on their MMR vaccination, which is very safe and effective. The mumps component of the MMR vaccine is 88 percent effective on average when a person gets two doses and 78 percent effective on average with one dose.

Children may also get MMRV vaccine, which adds protection against varicella, commonly known as chickenpox. This vaccine is only licensed for use in children who are 12 months through 12 years of age. Other ways to prevent mumps are to wash hands often and thoroughly, to stay home when sick and to clean objects touched by a person who is ill.

For more information, contact the Seminole Health Department at 954-962-2009, the Florida Department of Health at floridahealth.gov/mumps or the CDC at cdc.gov/mumps.

This post was submitted to The Seminole Tribune by the Department of Health Broward County.

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