

## Infectious Mononucleosis (Mono, kissing disease) Fact Sheet

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** Infectious mononucleosis (IM) is a common infection of childhood characterized by fever, fatigue, sore throat and swollen lymph glands. It is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) which is related to the viruses that cause chickenpox and fever blisters.

EBV spreads from one person to another when infected saliva comes in contact with the mouth and, possibly, the nose or eyes. Although kissing is one way to catch IM, the virus can also be passed on cups, utensils or other objects, as well as in droplets coughed or sneezed into the air. It is believed that anyone who has been infected with EBV will continue to shed virus into the saliva for life. They usually remain immune to future attacks. The time between exposure to IM and the first signs of illness is usually 4 to 7 weeks.

**SYMPTOMS:** Most young children who become infected with EBV either remain perfectly well or have only a slight cold. Teenagers and young adults, on the other hand, are more likely to develop infectious mononucleosis; a larger dose of virus is transferred by kissing than by a sneeze or cough.

A typical case of “mono” begins with weakness and fatigue, sore throat, fever and lack of appetite. Tonsils may be fiery red, swollen and covered with pus. When excessively large and painful they can interfere with swallowing and breathing. Lymph glands all over the body, but particularly in the neck, are enlarged, as are organs in the abdomen such as the liver and spleen. A blotchy red rash appears in some cases. Complications are uncommon. Illness lasts 2 or 3 weeks. Some individuals remain weak and tire easily for several months.

**TREATMENT:** No specific treatment is available for infectious mononucleosis.

For relief of pain and temperature over 102°F it is helpful to give acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®, and Panadol®). If you feel that stronger pain medication is needed, speak with your doctor or school health office.

Fatigue and weakness are best treated by resting. A diet containing nutritious foods and plenty should be offered. Cold milk shakes containing vitamin-mineral-calorie supplements (e.g. Instant Breakfast) are well-suited for this purpose.

**CONTAGION:** Contagion of IM is low and second cases in a family are uncommon.

Although no specific precautions are indicated, contact with infected saliva through kissing or sharing of cups, utensils, toys or wash cloths should be avoided.

**RETURN TO SCHOOL:** Patients with IM may return to school as soon as they feel well and have no fever.

**COMMON CONCERNS:** There is no way to prevent IM after exposure has occurred. Relapses and second attacks of IM, though rare, do occur. Illness is usually milder than it was the first time.