

## MONONUCLEOSIS

Infectious Mononucleosis or “mono” is a viral infection. The most common virus causing mono is Epstein Barr Virus or EBV. Rarely, a mono illness may be caused by other viruses such as cytomegalovirus (CMV).

The most common symptoms of mono are fever, swollen glands, sore throat (often with white spots on the tonsils), and abdominal pain. Mono may also cause headache, body aches, joint aches and rash. These symptoms may last longer than expected with a regular cold virus. Fatigue is common and may be lingering in some children, especially teens.

The name “mono” comes from the pattern of the white blood cells seen when a blood count is done. Specific blood testing for viruses may confirm the diagnosis.

Infections with EBV are frequently mild and unrecognized, especially in infants and young children. Thus, there is a spectrum of disease, from mild to severe.

Mono is transmitted by contact with infected secretions, especially saliva. The saliva may contain viruses for many months after infection, but the transmission rate is highest when the symptoms are at their worst. The incubation period (that is, the time between when the virus enters the body and when the patient becomes ill) is 30 to 50 days. Once the patient recovers, (s)he does not get EBV mono again.

Treatment for mono is supportive; antibiotics are not helpful because they don't kill viruses. In fact, using antibiotics for mono can cause worsening symptoms, especially rash. Rest is important. Good nutrition is helpful for recovery. Using medication for pain or fever (Tylenol or ibuprofen) may also make the child feel better. During the illness, most people will have enlargement of the spleen. This increases the risk of rupture of the spleen, especially during sports, where an abdominal injury can occur. The risk is highest in the first 21 days of the illness, however splenic rupture rarely occurs beyond 28 days from the start of symptoms. Unfortunately, physical exam and even ultrasound cannot reliably tell if the spleen is enlarged, so the safest thing to do is to restrict sports for 4 weeks from the start of the illness. When the tonsils are extremely swollen and interfering with swallowing, steroid medication such as prednisone may be helpful for comfort and to allow enough fluid intake.

Children with mono may return to school when fever free for 24 hours and when the symptoms improve enough for the child to tolerate a school day. This usually occurs within a few days. As explained above, contact sports should be restricted for at least 4 weeks from the start of symptoms. Other extracurricular activities may be resumed if feeling well enough to participate. Items in contact with saliva, such as straws or drinks should not be shared.

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