

Cytomegalovirus

Fact Sheet

What is Cytomegalovirus?

Cytomegalovirus or CMV is a common virus that infects most people worldwide at some time during their lives but rarely causes obvious illness. It is a member of the herpes viridae family. Like other herpes viruses, CMV infection can become dormant or asleep in the body and reactivate at some point. When CMV is present at birth it is reportable.

How is CMV spread?

Transmission can occur from an infected mother to her fetus or newborn and also by blood transfusions and organ transplants. The virus can be spread from person to person by direct contact. Any person with CMV infection, even without symptoms, can pass it on to others. In an infected person, the virus is present in many bodily fluids, such as urine, blood, saliva, semen, cervical secretions, and breast milk. CMV can spread in households and childcare centers through hand-to-mouth contact with infected bodily fluids.

What are the symptoms?

Newborns that get CMV infection after birth have few if any symptoms or complications. When symptoms do occur they can include developmental problems, vision or hearing problems, lung problems, poor weight gain, swollen glands, rash, liver problems, and blood problems.

Most children and adults who are infected with CMV do not develop symptoms. Those who do develop symptoms may have high fever, chills, swollen glands, severe tiredness, a generally ill feeling, headache, and an enlarged spleen similar to infectious mononucleosis.

When do symptoms appear?

Most exposed people never develop symptoms. In those who do, the time between exposure and symptoms is about 3 to 12 weeks. CMV remains in the body throughout a lifetime. The duration of the illness varies depending on the type of infection, the age and the health of the infected person. CMV infections acquired at birth can cause developmental problems that can affect a child throughout life. CMV in young adults might cause symptoms for only 2 to 3 weeks.

Who is at risk?

Almost all people have been exposed to CMV by the time they are adults, but the virus usually does not make otherwise healthy people sick. People who are at an increased risk for active infections and serious complications are:

- babies born to women who have a first-time CMV infection during pregnancy (risk to the fetus is greatest during the first 20 weeks),
- pregnant women who work with infants and children,
- persons with weakened immune systems, including cancer patients on chemotherapy, organ transplant recipients and persons with HIV infection.

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What precautions can be taken?

Good hygiene and careful hand washing are the most important control measures. This is particularly important when there is contact with child's urine or saliva. Avoid kissing babies or young children on the mouth or cheek.

Routine blood testing for CMV is not done in pregnancy. Pregnant women with concerns need to consult their health care provider on an individual basis.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 or 1-800-267-2803, ext. 349. | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | hpePublicHealth.ca

References

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