

EPSTEIN-BARR VIRUS FACT SHEET

Overview

Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), also known as human herpesvirus 4, is a member of the herpes virus family. It is one of the most common human viruses. EBV is found all over the world. Most people get infected with EBV at some point in their lives. EBV spreads most commonly through bodily fluids, primarily saliva. EBV can cause infectious mononucleosis, also called mono, and other illnesses.

Signs and Symptoms

People usually develop symptoms about four to six weeks after exposure to the virus. Symptoms of EBV infection can include:

- Fatigue;
- Fever;
- Inflamed throat;
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck;
- Enlarged spleen;
- Swollen liver; and
- Rash.

Many people become infected with EBV in childhood. EBV infections in children usually do not cause symptoms, or the symptoms are not distinguishable from other mild, brief childhood illnesses. People who get symptoms from EBV infection, usually teenagers or adults, get better in two to four weeks. However, some people may feel fatigued for several weeks or even months.

After you get an EBV infection, the virus becomes latent (inactive) in your body. In some cases, the virus may reactivate. This does not always cause symptoms, but people with compromised immune systems are more likely to develop symptoms if EBV reactivates.

Transmission

EBV is spread by saliva through:

- Kissing;
- Sharing drinks and food;
- Using the same cups, eating utensils or toothbrushes; and
- Having contact with toys that children have drooled on.

The virus probably survives on an object such as a toothbrush or cup at least as long as the object remains moist. There is no evidence that disinfecting the objects will prevent EBV from spreading.

EBV can also spread through blood and semen during sexual contact, blood transfusions and organ transplantations.

The first time you get infected with EBV (primary EBV infection) you can spread the virus for weeks, even before you have symptoms. Once the virus is in your body, it stays there in a latent (inactive) state. If the virus reactivates, you can potentially spread EBV to others no matter how much time has passed since the initial infection.

Tests and Diagnosis

Diagnosing EBV infection can be challenging, since symptoms are similar to other illnesses. EBV infection can be confirmed with a blood test that detects antibodies. About 90 percent of adults have antibodies that show that they have a current or past EBV infection.

Treatments

There is no specific treatment for EBV. However, some things can be done to help relieve symptoms, including:

- Drinking fluids to stay hydrated;
- Getting plenty of rest; and
- Taking over-the-counter medications for pain and fever.

Prevention

There is no vaccine to protect against EBV infection. You can help protect yourself by avoiding kissing or sharing drinks, food or personal items, like toothbrushes, with people who have EBV infection.

Additional Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/epstein-barr/>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician for specific clinical information.

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