

Epstein-Barr Virus Fact Sheet

1. **What is Epstein-Barr Virus (EBV)?** - EBV is a member of the *Herpesvirus* family and is one of the most common human viruses. EBV occurs worldwide, and most people *become infected* with EBV sometime during their lives. In the U.S., as many as 95% of adults between 35 and 40 years of age have been infected. Infants become susceptible to EBV as soon as maternal antibody protection (present at birth) disappears, usually after 6 months of age. Children often become infected with EBV, and these infections usually cause no symptoms or are indistinguishable from the other mild, brief illnesses of childhood. If EBV occurs during adolescence or young adulthood, infectious mononucleosis will result 35% to 50% of the time.
2. **What are the Symptoms of Infectious Mononucleosis?** – The most common symptoms are fever, sore throat, and swollen lymph glands. Sometimes, a swollen spleen or liver involvement may develop. Heart problems or involvement of the central nervous system occurs only rarely, and infectious mononucleosis is almost never fatal. There are no known associations between active EBV infection and problems during pregnancy, such as miscarriages or birth defects. Although the symptoms of Infectious Mononucleosis usually resolve in 1 or 2 months, EBV remains dormant in a few cells in the throat and blood for the rest of the person's life. Periodically, the virus can reactivate and is commonly found in the saliva of infected persons. This reactivation usually occurs without symptoms of illness.
3. **Does EBV cause Other Diseases?** – Yes. Since EBV also establishes a lifelong dormant infection in some cells of the body's immune system, a late event is the emergence of Burkitt's lymphoma and nasopharyngeal carcinoma, two rare cancers that are not normally found in the United States. EBV appears to play an important role in these malignancies, but is probably not the sole cause of disease.
4. **How is EBV Spread?** - Transmission of EBV requires intimate contact with the saliva of an infected person. Occasionally, the virus is transmitted through blood transfusions. Transmission of the virus through air does not normally occur. EBV can be transmitted by persons with asymptomatic infections.
5. **What is the Incubation Period?** - The time from infection to appearance of symptoms ranges from 4 to 6 weeks. Persons with infectious mononucleosis may be able to spread EBV to others for a period of weeks. However, no special precautions or isolation procedures are recommended, since the virus is also found frequently in the saliva of healthy people.
6. **How is Infectious Mononucleosis Diagnosed?** - The clinical diagnosis of infectious mononucleosis is based on the symptoms of fever, sore throat, swollen lymph glands, and the age of the patient. Usually, laboratory tests are needed for confirmation. Laboratory findings for persons with infectious mononucleosis include an elevated white blood cell count, an increased percentage of certain atypical white blood cells, and a positive reaction to a "mono spot" test.



7. **What is the Treatment for Infectious Mononucleosis?** - There is no specific treatment, other than treating the symptoms. No antiviral drugs or vaccines are available.
8. **Is EBV related to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?** - It is important to note that symptoms related to infectious mononucleosis caused by EBV infection seldom last for more than 4 months. When such an illness lasts more than 6 months, it is frequently called chronic EBV infection. However, valid laboratory evidence for continued active EBV infection is seldom found in these patients. The illness should be investigated further to determine if it meets the criteria for chronic fatigue syndrome, or CFS.
9. **For more information about Epstein-Barr Virus:**
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/ebv.htm>

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