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Mumps outbreak: Know the importance of MMR vaccine

The absence of mumps vaccine from the National Immunization Programme is among the causative factors for the rise in cases

Written by Pragna L Krupa

With quotes from Dr Tejo Pratap (neonatologist), Dr Shivaprakash Sosale (pediatrician), and Dr Upendra Kinjawadekar (pediatrician)



The vaccine provides 90% protection against the disease.

States like Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Telangana are seeing a sudden increase in the number of mumps cases. Mumps is a highly contagious disease that easily spreads among children and affects the salivary glands also called parotid glands, resulting in swelling of the cheeks and jaws. The current mumps outbreak has become a cause of concern among the parents.

Mumps is a viral infection that spreads through saliva, nasal secretions, and close personal contact. The infection affects all ages but it is severe in children as their immunity is low compared to adults, says Dr Tejo Pratap, consultant and HOD of Neonatology, Fernandez Hospital, Hyderabad. "Once a child is exposed to the infection, it takes about 10 to 12 days for the signs to appear. That's the time it's highly contagious and spreads faster," he said.

Mumps outbreak: Signs in children

Parotitis, enlargement of parotid glands (responsible for production of saliva), is a typical sign of mumps, says Dr Shivaprakash Sosale, associate professor, department of pediatrics, Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute, Bangalore. "The condition is clinically diagnosed based on symptoms. Parotitis could be caused due to various reasons such as blockage of salivary glands or poor oral hygiene. In Mumps, children show signs like: swelling of one or both the cheeks and jaws that may be tender and painful accompanied by fever, headache, joint pain, loss of appetite, and dry mouth," he explained.



Dr Sosale added that the condition is self-limiting and there is no specific treatment as it subsides on its own. "However, the signs must not be ignored as the infection can lead to severe complications such as aseptic meningitis (inflammation of the meninges, a membrane covering the brain), seizures, arthritis and can also affect various organs such as the pancreas, testicles in boys and ovaries in girls," he cautioned.

Why is Mumps on the rise?

Mumps is a highly contagious disease and can be asymptomatic in adults who can easily pass it on to children without knowledge, says Dr Pratap. He said that the infection is commonly seen among children aged between 4 to 15 years. "In Hyderabad, we are seeing about two to three cases of mumps daily which is quite high. Predominantly, the cases are seen in children who have not taken the MMR (Mumps, Measles and Rubella) vaccine," he said.

The current national immunization schedule in India includes two doses of MR (Measles and Rubella) vaccine and it does not include mumps. "There is a sharp increase in cases of mumps in the country as the vaccine is not part of the national immunization program of the Government of India. The vaccine schedule recommended by Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) includes immunization against MMR. It has to be included in the national immunization scheme to prevent such outbreaks," said Dr Upendra Kinjawadekar, president of Indian Academy of Pediatrics. Though it was not included in the national immunization program, Delhi is one of the states which started giving mumps vaccine under the state immunization program in 1999.

Dr Kinjawadekar who is currently practicing in Mumbai said that children who have not taken the MMR vaccine are more vulnerable to the disease. "MMR is given in three doses at 9 months, 16 months, and 5 years. Once a child is infected with the disease, the immunity builds up and the chances of getting it again is very low," he said.

Transmission and prevention

Schools are a hub of transmission and if one child is infected, the chances of infection spreading to every child who is in close contact with him/her is high, said Dr Pratap. "We advise parents to ensure the MMR vaccine is part of their child's vaccine schedule." Doctors advise that during such outbreaks parents must be cautious about their children or any child in their contacts who shows signs of Mumps.

The vaccine provides 90% protection against the disease and even if a child gets the infection post-vaccination, the symptoms are mild and less severe," he said, adding that they have been spreading awareness in schools to administer vaccines.

Dr Pratap adds that even if a child is exposed to the infection, he/she can take the vaccine before he/she starts showing the symptoms. "The third dose is given at the age of 5 years. Children who have missed the first dose can take it up at any age and go for the second dose after a month," adds Dr Pratap.

Other than vaccines, maintaining hand hygiene, oral hygiene, wearing masks, keeping separate utensils, and avoiding close contact would help, say doctors. As Dr Pratap emphasizes, it is important for parents to teach children not to share their plates, lunch boxes, and bottles with other children either at home with family or outside with friends in schools to avoid spread of infections.

Takeaways

- Mumps is a highly contagious viral infection that passes on from one person to another through saliva and close contact. Currently, there is an outbreak of mumps in several cities which has become a cause of concern for many parents.
- The infection can affect any age group, but it is more severe in children. It results in the swelling of cheeks and jaws.
- The infection can be prevented through the MMR vaccine which is given at 9 months, 18 months, and 5 years of age. Most children are given MR vaccine which does not include mumps and doctors advise parents to ensure they include MMR.



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