



Cytomegalovirus (CMV)

What is Cytomegalovirus (CMV)?

CMV is a member of the herpes virus family. Anyone can become infected with CMV. In the United States, between 50% and 85% of adults are infected by 40 years of age. Most people infected with CMV have mild or no symptoms. Infections with CMV during pregnancy can result in disease to the fetus (Congenital CMV infection). Once CMV is in a person's body, it stays there for life.

How can I get CMV?

The virus is usually spread person to person by contact with saliva, urine, blood, breast milk, or other bodily fluids of an infected person. CMV is also sexually transmitted. It can also be spread through organ transplants and blood transfusions. Infected women can pass the virus to their unborn children during pregnancy or to their babies while breastfeeding. Although the virus is not easily spread, it is most often spread in households and between young children in day care centers.

What are the symptoms of CMV infection?

Most children and adults who are infected with CMV do not become sick. Those with symptoms may have fever, sore throat, swollen glands, and tiredness. Immunocompromised people (such as AIDS patients or those receiving cancer treatments) may have a more serious illness such as pneumonia or retinitis (inflammation of the retina in the eye which may lead to blindness). Infants that are born with CMV may have permanent damage such as hearing or vision loss.

How soon after I am exposed will I have symptoms?

Most people never show symptoms from CMV infection so it is unknown exactly how long after exposure the symptoms begin. Illness starts within three to eight weeks following a transfusion with infected blood and one to four months after transplantation of an infected organ. A child infected during birth may show symptoms three to twelve weeks after delivery. In some children infected at birth, symptoms may not appear until months or years after birth.

How long can someone spread CMV to others?

Young children can shed the virus for months to years after they become infected. Adults shed for a shorter period, usually less than 6 months. However, persons may shed the virus off and on over a period of time, without any signs or symptoms.

Can a person get CMV again?

Once a person becomes infected, the virus stays in the body for life. Most people never experience any symptoms. Some people may experience recurrent disease where the symptoms return after not having any for a period of time. Recurrent disease rarely occurs unless the person's immune system is suppressed due to medications or another disease.

How do I know if I have CMV?

A healthcare provider can do a blood test to determine if a person has been infected with CMV. Your healthcare provider may also take other samples (saliva, urine, or other body tissues) for viral culture.

Is there a treatment for CMV?

Healthy people who are infected with CMV usually do not require medical treatment. There is no drug licensed to treat congenital CMV infection. Certain antiviral drugs may be used for patients with weakened immunity that have either sight-related or life-threatening illnesses.

Is there a vaccine to protect against CMV?

Currently there is no available vaccine to prevent CMV. There are a few CMV vaccines being developed, but are still in the research stage.

Can someone still go to school, daycare, or work if they have CMV?

Yes, persons with CMV may still attend school, work, or daycare. However, persons with fevers should be excluded from group settings until they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.

How can I protect myself from CMV?

Practicing good hand hygiene is the best way to prevent infection with CMV. Person working in healthcare settings should wear plastic disposable gloves when handling sheets or clothes soiled with feces or urine of persons who are sick. Simple hand washing with soap and water is effective in removing the virus from the hands.

What is Congenital CMV infection?

Congenital CMV infection is a serious disease in babies who were infected with CMV before birth. About one of every 150 babies is born with congenital CMV infection. About one in five of these babies may have permanent health problems. The most common health problems of babies born with CMV are hearing loss and vision loss. If you know your baby was born with CMV, it is important to have regular hearing and vision screenings.

How can pregnant women prevent Congenital CMV infection?

Pregnant women can help prevent congenital CMV infection by reducing their exposure to CMV. Pregnant women should practice good hygiene and carefully wash their hands after caring for patients or children. This is particularly important when handling diapers or having contact with the child's urine or saliva. Pregnant women working in childcare centers should not kiss babies or young children on the mouth. Do not share food, drinks, or utensils (spoons or forks) with young children. Clean surfaces and toys that come into contact with children's urine or saliva often. Pregnant women should contact their healthcare provider if they think they may have been exposed to CMV.