

What is Cytomegalovirus (CMV)?

CMV is a virus that infects most people, but rarely causes illness. CMV is a member of the herpes virus family. It can "hide" in your body without causing illness, then reappear later and cause illness.

Who gets CMV?

Anyone. Many adults may have already been infected at some time during their life.

How is CMV spread?

CMV is spread from person to person by direct contact. It is found in the urine, saliva, blood, semen, and other body fluids. The virus can spread from an infected mother to her fetus or newborn baby. CMV can be spread by blood transfusion and organ transplants.

What are the symptoms of CMV infection?

Most children and adults who are infected with CMV do not become ill. Those who do may have fever and swollen glands, and feel tired. Individuals with weakened immune systems such as transplant recipients and those infected with HIV may have a more serious illness, such as pneumonia. About 7 of every 1,000 babies born in the U.S. are infected with CMV at birth. Of these 7 babies, one may have health problems.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

If symptoms develop, they usually occur between 3 - 12 weeks after infection. Most people do not become ill.

How long can an infected person carry CMV?

CMV may remain in the body throughout the person's lifetime. The virus may be found in the urine or saliva of infected people, whether or not they are ill.

How is CMV diagnosed and treated?

There are special laboratory tests to grow the virus, but testing is difficult, expensive and not widely available. Specific blood tests can be helpful to the physician in making a diagnosis or determining if a person has been exposed, but the results are sometimes inaccurate. Currently, no treatment exists for CMV infections in healthy individuals. Antiviral treatment may be used for those with immune systems weakened by life threatening illness. An effective vaccine has not been developed.

Should an infected person be excluded from school or work?

No.

What precautions should pregnant women take?

Pregnant women should carefully wash their hands after handling wet diapers or having contact with urine or saliva. Pregnant women working in childcare centers should not kiss babies or young children on the mouth; hugging is OK. Pregnant women should ask their doctor about CMV infections.

What can be done to stop the spread of CMV?

Good handwashing is the best way to prevent infection. Healthcare workers should wear plastic disposable gloves when handling sheets or clothing soiled with the feces or urine of persons who are ill.