

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 infections are asymptomatic, meaning individuals will not experience illness due to CMV. Persons can remain infected with CMV causing illness later in life. Infections with CMV during pregnancy can result in disease to the fetus.

How is CMV spread?

CMV is spread from person to person by contact with saliva, urine, blood, breast milk or other bodily fluids of an infected person. CMV can be sexually transmitted through semen and vaginal secretions, through organ transplants, and rarely through 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 highly contagious, it is commonly 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 ill. Those who do may experience fever, sore throat, swollen glands and feel tired. Immunocompromised people (such as AIDS patients or those receiving cancer treatments) may have a more serious illness such as pneumonia. About seven of every 1,000 babies born in the U.S. will be infected with CMV at birth. Out of these seven babies, one may have 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 conduct regular hearing and vision screenings.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

Most people never become ill from CMV infection so it is unknown exactly how long after exposure one will have symptoms. Illness following a transplant or transfusion with infected blood begins within three to eight weeks. Infection acquired during birth may be seen 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 an infected person carry CMV?

CMV remains in the body throughout the person's lifetime. Infected people who may or may not be ill can occasionally shed the virus in urine or saliva. The virus rapidly dies once outside the body.

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, the return of symptoms after not having any for a period of time. Recurrent disease rarely occurs unless the person's immune system is suppressed due to therapeutic drugs or another disease.

How is CMV diagnosed?

A blood test can be done by your healthcare provider and can determine if a person has been infected with CMV. Your healthcare provider may also take a throat swab for viral culture.

What is the treatment for CMV infections?

Currently, no treatment is recommended for CMV infection in the healthy individual, including pregnant women. Antiviral drug therapy is now being evaluated in infants. Certain antiviral drugs are used for patients with depressed immunity who have either sight-related or life-threatening illnesses. Vaccines are still in the research and development stage.

Should an infected person be excluded from school or work?

There is no reason to exclude people who have CMV from school, daycare or work.

What can be done to stop the spread of CMV?

Practicing good hand hygiene is the best way to prevent infection with CMV. Persons working in healthcare settings should wear plastic disposable gloves when handling sheets or clothes soiled with the feces or urine of persons who are ill. Simple hand washing with soap and water is effective in removing the virus from the hands. 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 child care centers should not kiss babies or young children on the mouth. Do not share food, drinks, or utensils (spoons or forks) with young children. Hugging is OK. Pregnant women should ask their healthcare provider about CMV.

