

## **STUDENT HEALTH INFORMATION**

### ***MONONUCLEOSIS***

#### **What is Mono?**

Mono, or Infectious Mononucleosis, is an illness caused by the Epstein Barr Virus (EBV). It varies in severity from a mild illness with barely noticeable symptoms to a more serious one, which occasionally requires hospital admission. It occurs most commonly in adolescents and young adults. About 100 cases of mono are seen at the Ithaca College Health Center every year. Spread is mainly through intimate contact and exchange of saliva, which is why it is sometimes called the “kissing disease”. However, it is not highly contagious. It does not occur in epidemics, is rarely passed to roommates and no special isolation precautions are needed.

#### **What are the symptoms?**

There is usually an incubation period (when the virus is in the body but there are no symptoms) of about 30-50 days. Typically, a person with mono then starts to feel fatigued, develops a sore throat, swollen neck glands, and a low grade fever. Occasionally mild jaundice occurs (yellow discoloration of the skin and whites of the eyes) caused by inflammation of the liver.

#### **How is Mono diagnosed?**

If mono is suspected, a definite diagnosis can be made by means of a blood test called a ‘Monospot’. The blood test may not be positive during the early stages of infection, and may need to be repeated. A complete blood count is usually done as well. This may show the characteristic atypical mononuclear white cells associated with mono.

#### **Are there any complications of Mono?**

Mono usually gets better over a period of about two weeks. There may be some residual fatigue lasting several more weeks. The most serious complication is rupture of the spleen, but this occurs extremely rarely. The spleen is an organ that filters and stores blood cells. It is situated in the upper abdomen on the left, just under the ribs. In mono it becomes larger and softer than usual, making it more susceptible to rupture from a blow or sudden jarring or straining (eg. weight lifting). If the spleen were to rupture, there would be severe abdominal pain, often followed quickly by dizziness and fainting. To minimize this risk, strenuous activity and contact sports should be avoided for 3-4 weeks after contracting mono.

You should call or come to the Health Center if you develop any of the following: abdominal pain, increasing difficulty swallowing or breathing, constipation (straining could lead to spleen rupture), or any other new or severe symptoms.

#### **How is mono treated?**

Mono gets better without specific treatment, but several prescription and non-prescription medications can be used to help alleviate the symptoms while the infection runs its course. Pain relievers, such as Tylenol or Advil help to ease throat pain and fever, and a short course of Prednisone (a type of anti-inflammatory steroid) might be prescribed to bring down swelling in the throat and glands. Antibiotics are not useful for mono but are occasionally needed to treat a co-existing strep throat. Adequate fluid intake and rest are important aids to recovery. Alcohol consumption and strenuous activity should be avoided for 3-4 weeks after becoming sick with mono.

#### **Are relapses common?**

No. It is extremely rare to get mono more than once. Tiredness may sometimes recur in the recovery period, but this will gradually diminish; full recovery without any lasting problem is the expected outcome.