

Glandular Fever (the 'Kissing Disease')

This pamphlet has been produced by Clyst Vale Community College Counselling Service. This is not intended to be a definitive guide, but does hope to provide information about glandular fever to families or a young person.

Glandular fever is a viral infection that can cause fever, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes (glands), loss of appetite and fatigue. Most cases of glandular fever are caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV).

Epstein-Barr virus

EBV is one of the most common viruses that can affect humans. It's estimated that 90% of all adults are infected with EBV. Most EBV infections take place during early childhood and usually produce few or no symptoms. Once an EBV infection has occurred, the virus will remain in the body for life, lying dormant in a number of throat and blood cells.

Risk for young people

If an EBV infection occurs during the teenage years, or early adulthood, there is a risk that it will lead to the development of glandular fever. The majority of glandular fever cases occur in teenagers and young people aged between 15 and 25, but the condition can affect people of any age.

Is Glandular fever contagious?

Yes! Glandular fever can be caught by coming into contact with the saliva of someone who is currently infected with the condition. Therefore, glandular fever can be spread through:

- kissing (it is often referred to as the kissing disease)
- exposure to coughs and sneezes, and sharing eating and drinking utensils, such as cups, glasses or unwashed forks and spoons.

You'll be contagious for at least two months after initial infection with EBV. Some people can have EBV in their saliva for up to 18 months after infection.

Once you've been exposed to glandular fever, it's highly unlikely that you'll develop a second bout of the infection. This is because almost everyone develops a life-long immunity to glandular fever after the initial infection.

Is there a cure?

No, there is no cure for glandular fever but, in most cases, the majority of the symptoms should pass within four to six weeks without treatment. Fatigue can sometimes persist for longer.

Fatigue

In most people, fatigue will end after three months. It's estimated that 9-22% of people will experience symptoms of fatigue that last up to six months. Long periods of rest are also important, and activity should be increased gradually. Stressful situations can make recovery slower, so if your child is facing exams you should talk to his or her teacher.

Complications

Complications of glandular fever are not common, but can be serious. They include a ruptured spleen, which would require emergency surgery, or secondary infection of the lungs (pneumonia).

Suspected further risks

Some doctors and researchers suspect that falling ill with EBV can also leave a young person prone to acquire Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) or myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). These two conditions are often one and the same (see our leaflet on CFS and ME).

One way to help avoid someone suffering from glandular fever also suffering from CFS or ME is to reduce his or her stress levels as much as possible. Talk to the child, find out what is worrying them and try to help and reassure them.

Caution must be taken once the sufferer of glandular fever begins to feel better. They should be encouraged to take things easy, to have plenty of rest to help their body fully recover, and not to rush into making up for their long period of inactivity. Talk with the school and they will try to accommodate your child's needs, perhaps by providing an exit card and making alternative arrangements for PE.

Long-term illness

As with any long-term illness, glandular fever can make a sufferer feel very grumpy, irritable and perhaps depressed. Books, magazines, DVD's, a new console game, board games and good company may help!

School nurse

The school nurse is happy to talk to parents or sufferers of glandular fever to help explain the condition and offer advice.

Useful websites

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Glandular-fever/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

www.glandularfever.me.uk