

Script – Print – Kiss mononucleosis goodbye

Remember your high school or college days when you came down with a nasty sore throat, hoping it wasn't a bad case of mononucleosis, commonly known as mono?

These days, mono has taken a back seat to other illnesses such as COVID, flu and RSV. But the "kissing disease" virus is still around, albeit a less common and much more treatable illness.

"Mono is a viral illness that people between 15 and 24 typically get that is spread by another person's infected saliva," says Breanne Gendron, a nurse practitioner with OSF HealthCare. "It causes a sore throat, headache, fatigue, swollen glands in your neck, and it makes people feel generally unwell."

Most people are exposed to mono as children which provides some immunity to the viral illness as they age. Gendron says mono is comparable to strep throat.

"When you come in to see your provider, they may swab you for strep to rule it out because strep is caused by a bacteria and requires an antibiotic," Gendron says. "Mono is caused by a virus and just needs time and over the counter medication to be comfortable. So, we want to figure out the difference. Sometimes it's obvious depending on how swollen the lymph nodes are in the neck, but we rule that out in your visit."

Gendron says mono is not as common as strep or influenza because it has a longer incubation period. Still she sees a number of cases in her practice. And because it takes about three weeks to develop symptoms from exposure, it's not as quick to infect as many people.

"The nickname for mono was the kissing disease because it's caused by saliva so you can get it from kissing, sharing a cup, or if your toothbrushes are touching in the cupholder," Gendron says. "Anything that involves saliva sharing would cause mono to spread. The long name for mono is mononucleosis and it's caused by the Epstein Barr Virus. It can be caused by other viruses too, but more commonly, the Epstein Barr Virus is the offending organism."

The typical symptoms for mono include:

- Extreme fatigue
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Head and body aches
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Swollen liver or spleen or both
- Rash

Gendron says the best ways to relieve symptoms is drinking plenty of fluids to stay hydrated, getting plenty of rest and taking over-the-counter medications for pain and fever. There is no vaccine for mono.

She adds that because the spleen may become enlarged due to mono, people should avoid contact sports until fully recovered. The reason being is participating in any sporting event can be strenuous and may cause the spleen to rupture.

Most people recover from mono in two to four weeks, but some will still feel tired for several more weeks.

"The best way to avoid mono is to avoid sharing water bottles and cups," Gendron adds. "Avoid ill people and wash your hands regularly."

For more information, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).