

Mumps Cases Suspected at the University of Virginia

March 14, 2008 -- The Thomas Jefferson Health District has announced that two University of Virginia undergraduates have suspected cases of the mumps.

Both suspected cases were reported to the University's Student Health Center on March 10, the day that classes resumed following spring break. Laboratory tests are currently being conducted to determine whether or not the students do have the virus.

In the fall of 2006, U.Va. had an outbreak of mumps with 53 cases.

"A significant difference between the previous experience with mumps and our current situation is that a much higher percentage of our students are compliant with the mumps vaccine requirement than was the case in 2006," said James Turner, executive director of the Student Health Center. Just a handful of undergraduates out of more than 13,000 have not complied with the mumps vaccine requirement.

All students are required to have two doses of mumps vaccine or a positive blood antibody test for mumps, which are the only means of assuring protection from mumps. While two doses of mumps vaccine is 90-95 percent protective, it will often minimize complications even if a vaccine recipient contracts the disease.

According to Student Health Center records, 99.91 percent of undergraduate students and 99.56 percent of graduate students have been fully vaccinated.

"Vaccination is the best way to prevent the disease, although it is not always 100 percent effective," said Thomas Jefferson Health District Director, Lilian Peake, M.D., M.P.H. "Unvaccinated individuals have a much higher risk of contracting mumps or suffering a complication than do those who have been vaccinated."

The health department and U.Va. are working together to monitor the situation, to communicate individually with the small cohort of unvaccinated students, and to take steps to reduce the risk that infected students will pass the disease on to others.

The University has identified special housing in which infected students will be able to live temporarily in order to lessen the risk of infecting others.

Mumps is a virus that can cause fever, headache, muscle aches, and swelling and tenderness of the glands close to the jaw. Serious complications are rare. The virus is spread through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes or through direct contact with the saliva of an infected person. Symptoms usually appear about 18 days after exposure, but may appear any time within 12 to 25 days. Mumps is contagious from three days before the onset of swelling of the glands close to the jaw until five days after the swelling begins.

Washing your hands for 20 seconds or more with soapy water or using an alcohol based liquid sanitizer, avoiding sharing drinking and eating utensils, and staying home if you have developed symptoms consistent with mumps can help decrease the spread of illness. If symptoms occur, call your physician and ask whether you should be seen.

- A Mumps Hotline (924-1525) has been established at Student Health for those with questions.
- Updated information will be available at the Student Health Web site
- More information on mumps is available at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site

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