

Glandular Fever

What is glandular fever?

Glandular fever is an infection caused by a virus called Epstein-Barr virus. Although it can affect people of any age, it most commonly affects teenagers and young adults.

The main symptoms are:

- **Sore throat**
- **Flu like symptoms** (fever, muscle aches, headaches)
- **Swollen glands** (usually in the neck but can be under the arm or in the groin too)
- **Fatigue** (tiredness)

Causes

Glandular fever is often referred to as “the kissing disease” as it can be transferred from person to person via saliva.

However, it can also be transferred via close contact with infected individuals especially via coughing or sneezing, or when sharing utensils such as glasses, knives or forks.

It can take up to 6 weeks for a person infected with the virus to develop the symptoms (incubation period), and once infected, they can be contagious for a couple of months.

Very occasionally people carry the infection in their saliva for about 18 months or even intermittently for life.

However, once you have had the infection, you develop antibodies (cells in the body

that recognise and fight the infection in the future), and so it is extremely unlikely that you will ever develop the illness again.

Investigations

Your doctor will ask a full **history** of your symptoms, **examine** you (look in your mouth, feel your neck and your abdomen) and take a **blood sample**.

Even if you do have glandular fever, the blood test may occasionally come back as negative, especially early in the course of the disease.

However, if the doctor is highly suspicious for the disease, they may still treat you for the illness and then take another sample 1 – 3 weeks later to confirm.

Treatment

There is no treatment specifically for glandular fever; however it will settle on its own with time. Treatment offered will be to help relieve the symptoms only.

- **Painkillers:** Such as anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen) help relieve pain from the sore throat and muscle aches. Paracetamol will also help to reduce the fever.
- **Fluids:** Helps to prevent dehydration – important in the recovery of any illness.
- **Antibiotics:** Antibiotics will not help against the virus as they work on bacteria only.

However, glandular fever can mimic or go on to give rise to other infections such as

bacterial tonsillitis and so antibiotics may sometimes be prescribed.

It is important to finish any course of antibiotics prescribed by your doctor.

Complications / associated symptoms

The virus can affect many parts of the body:

Liver: You may get mild inflammation of the liver during the infection.

This may be shown only on the blood tests though you may get a mild jaundice (yellowing of the skin). It is important to avoid alcohol during this time.

Spleen: You may get a mild enlargement of the spleen (an organ in the left upper abdomen which stores and processes red blood cells).

This usually settles by 6-8 weeks, but it is very important not to play any contact sports such as rugby during this time as the spleen may more easily be damaged at its larger size and rupture.

Airway: It is common to get enlarged tonsils during the illness. Very rarely the tonsils can become so enlarged that it is more difficult to breath. If you develop any difficulty breathing you must come immediately to hospital as an **emergency**.

Swallowing difficulties: If the tonsils are so enlarged that you cannot eat or drink, you may need to be admitted to hospital to be given fluid via a drip inserted into a vein to prevent dehydration.

Rash: Occasionally a widespread non itchy rash can form. This usually settles quickly on its own.

Fatigue: Tiredness is common during the illness and usually settles within a few weeks. Rarely, 'post viral fatigue' can occur in which the tiredness lasts for variable lengths of times after the other symptoms have long passed.

Useful Contacts

If you have any further queries or concerns, it may be worth discussing with your GP or you may find the following numbers useful:

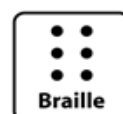
Ward 28: 0151 529 5238/5239

ENT outpatients Tel: 0151 529 0357

For questions about your health or health services Tel: 111.

Based on information sited on:-

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



If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on audio tape or disk and in other languages on request. Please contact:

Tel No: 0151 529 2906

Email: interpretationandtranslation@aintree.nhs.uk