

Mumps Encyclopedia Article

Mumps

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Mumps

Mumps is a contagious viral disease that causes painful enlargement of the salivary glands, most commonly the parotids. For this reason, the scientific name for mumps is *Epidemic parotitis*.

The condition was first described by **Hippocrates** with a clarity and thoroughness that one historian says is "worthy of any modern medical textbook." Hippocrates observed that the diseases occurred most commonly in young men, a fact that he attributed to their congregating at sports grounds. Women, who were inclined to be isolated in their own homes, were seldom taken ill with the disease, he noted. Interestingly enough, Hippocrates did not give a name to the condition that he described so well.

Over the centuries, medical writers paid little attention to mumps. Occasionally, mention was made of a local epidemic of the disease, as was recorded for Paris, France, in the sixteenth century by **Guillaume de Baillou** (1538-1616). Most experts seemed to believe that the disease was contagious, but no studies were done to confirm this suspicion.

The first detailed scientific description of mumps was provided by the British physician Robert Hamilton (1721-1793) in 1790. Hamilton's paper in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* finally made the disease well known among physicians.

Efforts to prove the contagious nature of mumps date to 1913. In that year, two French physicians, Charles-Jean-Henri Nicolle (1866-1936) and Ernest Alfred Conseil, attempted to transmit mumps from humans to monkeys, but were unable to obtain conclusive results. Eight years later, Martha Wollstein injected viruses taken from the saliva of a mumps patient into cats, producing inflammation of the parotid, testes, and brain tissue in the cats. Conclusive proof that mumps is transmitted by a filterable virus was finally obtained by two American researchers, Claude D. Johnson and Ernest William Goodpasture (1886-1960), in 1934.

A vaccine for mumps was developed by an American microbiologist, John Enders, in 1948. During World War II, Enders had developed a vaccine using a killed virus, but it was only moderately and temporarily successful. After the war, he began to investigate ways of growing mumps virus in a suspension of minced chick embryo and ox blood. The technique was successful and Enders' live virus vaccine is now routinely used to vaccinate children against this ancient disease.