Cytomegalovirus (CMV) Adult

Cytomegalovirus, or CMV, is a very common *virus* (a germ that can cause illness) that infects most adults in the United States by the time they are 40 years old. Most people who have or have had CMV infection never know it because infection with this virus most often does not cause any symptoms. However, once you are infected with CMV, you will have the virus in your body for the rest of your life.

Most of the time, and in most people, CMV causes no health problems. However, in certain people, infection can be dangerous. This includes:

- Women who are pregnant or plan to be pregnant.
  - CMV can be passed to an unborn or newly born child and cause health problems soon after birth or as they grow up.
- People with a weak *immune system* (helps the body fight off diseases).
  - This includes people on drugs that kill cancer cells (*chemotherapy*), people infected with HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), people who have had an *organ transplant* (an operation to give you a new body organ, such as a kidney) or bone marrow transplant and people receiving drugs that suppress the immune system.

Anyone who has had CMV infection can pass it on to others. The virus is passed from person to person because it is in body fluids. These include blood, urine, breast milk, spit (*saliva*) and men's sexual fluid that contains sperm (*semen*). If you have had CMV, it is important to take steps to keep from spreading the virus to others.

CAUSES

Adults become infected with CMV by coming in contact with body fluids from someone who already has it. CMV is not passed on by casual contact (such as shaking hands, hugging, kissing on the cheek). It is passed only through body fluids. This can happen if you:

- Get body fluids from an infected person on your hands and then rub your eyes or touch the inside of your nose or mouth.
- Have sex with someone who has had CMV.
- Kiss someone with the virus. That person's saliva would have to enter your mouth.
- Receive a blood transfusion. Tests for CMV in blood are not always 100% accurate.
- Have an organ or bone marrow transplant. If the donor had CMV, you could become infected, too.

SYMPTOMS

Many people with CMV live their whole life and never have symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they may include:

- Fever that lasts many days.
- Sore throat.
- Sore or enlarged glands in the neck and elsewhere in your body (*lymph nodes*).
- Achy muscles.
- Feeling very tired.
- Feeling weak.
- Headache.
- Weight loss.

People who have weak immune systems usually have more severe symptoms. For these patients, the virus may affect 1 part of the body. For example:

- The stomach or intestines, causing an infection (*gastroenteritis*).
- The liver, causing liver disease (*hepatitis*).
- The lungs, causing an illness that makes breathing difficult (*pneumonia*).
- The eyes, making it hard to see.

- The brain, causing seizures or coma. This is rare.

DIAGNOSIS

To decide if you have or have had CMV infection, your caregiver will probably:

- Ask about symptoms you have noticed.
- Ask about your overall health.
- Do a physical exam.
- Order blood tests. They can check for:
  - Antibodies to the virus. These are substances that fight CMV. They will be in your blood if you have had the virus infection.
  - Antibodies to the mononucleosis virus that causes a disease with similar symptoms.
  - The presence of the CMV virus itself.

TREATMENT

- No treatment will make the CMV virus go totally away from an infected person. However, many symptoms can be treated. Antiviral drugs may make complications of the infection less severe and can keep the virus from spreading in your body and causing more symptoms.
- The medications are sometimes given by *IV* (through a needle that puts the drug in your vein). This would be done in a hospital or clinic. Sometimes the drugs are taken in pill form. The drugs can have side effects. Talk with your caregiver about the benefits and risks of these drugs.
- *Immunoglobulin* (an antibody) may be prescribed for very bad infections. A high dose often is given. The goal is to help the body keep the virus under control.

PROGNOSIS

Most adults who are infected with CMV will have no health problems. But, the virus can harm some people. Remember to be careful so you do not spread it to others.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

If you have CMV:

- Wash your hands often.
- Throw away used tissues. This will keep other people from coming into contact with the virus.
- Take any medications prescribed by your caregiver. Follow the directions carefully.
- If you also have a weak immune system make sure you understand how to protect your health. Ask your caregiver if there is anything you should or should not do.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have questions about any medication that has been prescribed or suggested.
- You develop mild symptoms.
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C).
- You are extremely tired.
- Your muscles and your head ache.
- You develop more severe symptoms.
- You become confused.
- You are very irritable.
- Your muscles are unusually weak.
- Your vision becomes blurry. You have trouble seeing.

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