

College students bringing home mononucleosis

December 6 2013, by Evie Polsley

One of the hallmarks of heading home for winter break is the enormous amount of laundry college students bring home as a present for mom and dad. But the dirty socks might not be the only unwelcome guest they transport home. They might also bring mononucleosis, better known as mono.

"Mono is often called the 'kissing disease' because it's transmitted from person to person through saliva. But kissing is not the only way to contract mono. It can be spread by sharing drinks or food utensils. Since it occurs mostly in adolescents between the ages of 15 and 24, it's a common illness for many college students," said Khalilah Babino, DO, an immediate care physician at Loyola University Health System and assistant professor in the Department of Family Medicine at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

Usual [symptoms](#) for mono include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Body aches
- Sore throat
- Swollen glands, especially toward the back of the neck
- Headache
- Poor appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain

- Enlarged spleen
- Rash

"Mono symptoms can be similar to those of [strep throat](#) so it's important to get tested since treatment for these illnesses is different," Babino said. "Mono is a viral illness and can't be treated with antibiotic. Strep is a bacterial illness that often requires an antibiotic. Testing for both can be done rather quickly in a health-care provider's office."

Since there are no antiviral medications for mono it is treated by managing the symptoms. This includes:

- Rest
- Hydration
- Acetaminophen or non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory medication
- Or, if breathing problems develop, a prescription

"Fortunately, most symptoms resolve in a few weeks, but fatigue can last several months. Patients should wait until the fever has resolved and fatigue has improved before returning to school or work. Since there is the risk of a rupture of the spleen, most athletes should avoid sports for 3-4 weeks," Babino said.

The best way to avoid catching and spreading mono is to refrain from sharing beverages and eating utensils and, unfortunately, kissing.

"Even if your [college student](#) isn't showing signs of mono or other infection, winter break is a great time to get him or her in to see the doctor for a checkup," Babino said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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