

# Mumps outbreaks hitting U.S. migrant detention centers

August 29 2019, by E.j. Mundell, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—A new government report finds more than 900 cases of

dangerous and highly contagious mumps have occurred at 57 U.S. migrant detention facilities over the past year, with nearly half of cases occurring in Texas.

"Mumps is a highly contagious viral disease and can spread rapidly among people in close living quarters," said Dr. Robert Glatter, an emergency medicine physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

"Based upon recent video highlights of detention facilities noted in news reports, the horrid conditions seen may provide an environment ripe for rapid spread of the virus," Glatter added.

While the illness is typically seen in crowded living spaces such as college dorms, "this is the first report of mumps outbreaks in detention facilities," according to a team of researchers led by Jessica Leung. She's an epidemiologist specializing in viral diseases at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Glatter explained that mumps can become a very serious illness.

"Mumps can lead to serious and deadly complications, especially in those with cancer, weakened immune systems, the young, as well as in elderly patients," he said. "Complications related to mumps include meningitis, encephalitis, pancreatitis and hearing loss."

According to the CDC team, the first cases involved in these outbreaks were reported last October as a cluster of five occurring "among migrants who had been transferred between two detention facilities" in Texas.

By December, eight more detention centers in Texas and six facilities in five other states were reporting a total of 67 mumps cases.

By January, the outbreaks' continued spread "prompted CDC and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE] Health Services Corps to launch a coordinated national outbreak response," Leung's team reported.

Overall, between Sept. 1, 2018 and Aug. 22, 2019, a total of 898 cases of "confirmed and probable" mumps had been documented among adult migrants detained at 57 facilities across 19 states, the report said. In addition, 33 staff members at the detention facilities came down with mumps.

Nearly half (44%) "were reported from facilities that house ICE detainees in Texas," the findings showed.

Most of those who fell ill with mumps were young men—the average age was 25, and 94% of patients were male. Most are thought to have been exposed to the highly contagious mumps virus while in custody by ICE or another U.S. agency, the report said.

In at least 13 cases, illnesses were so severe as to require hospitalization, and 79 of the men developed orchitis—a painful inflammation of the testicles that can cause infertility.

All of these cases didn't need to happen, Glatter noted.

Immunization with the combined measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine "is the most effective way to prevent mumps and its associated complications," he stressed. "Before the vaccine was introduced, mumps was a common childhood disease."

Leung and her colleagues at the CDC agreed.

"MMR vaccination efforts differ among detention facilities," the

researchers wrote, but "facilities should follow local or state health department recommendations for preventing and responding to mumps."

Specifically, "detainees and staff members at increased risk for mumps should be offered MMR vaccine," the researchers noted.

These outbreaks are far from over, Leung's group added.

"As of August 22, 2019, mumps outbreaks are ongoing in 15 facilities in seven states," and as new migrants are brought in and detained, more cases of mumps are expected, the team concluded.

The findings were reported in the Aug. 30 issue of the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

**More information:** There's more on mumps and mumps vaccination at the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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