

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid The Epstein-Barr virus is a member of the herpesvirus family. Other diseases caused by viruses in this family include chickenpox, shingles, oral herpes and genital herpes.

Q. I have a question about mono. My potential partner told me that she contracted mono when she was 5, and now she is 30. I've heard that mono is inactive after several months but can randomly become active again. Is there still a chance I could get it from her even though it's been so long since she had it?

A. Chances are, when people talk about "mono", they are referring to infectious mononucleosis caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), not the golden age of AM radio. To further complicate the name game, mono is sometimes called "the kissing disease", since it is transmitted by saliva and close contact. And while mono is an infectious disease – just like the flu is – it is not considered a sexually transmitted disease.

Although it sparks its share of confusion, mono needn't be a major cause for concern. In the United States, about 95% of the population is infected with it by the time they reach 40, with a large number of those infections occurring during adolescence and young adulthood. Mono can also be contracted during childhood, and early transmission is widely seen outside the U.S. and other developed countries.

EBV is so common, that you may have had a mild case of it without knowing it. The intensity of symptoms can vary widely – some people end up with what feels like a cold, while others feel drained for weeks or even months. Symptoms can include fever, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes, fatigue, and sometimes, a swollen spleen. And while there is no specific treatment for mono, most people get better within two weeks and develop immunity to future infections.

As you mentioned, EBV remains dormant in the body until it intermittently reactivates in the saliva. This means it's nearly impossible to prevent being exposed to the virus over time. As a result, it's not practical to test a person's saliva for EBV to prevent transmission, and not worth avoidance if this is someone you want to be with.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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