



Mononucleosis (“Mono”)

Mononucleosis is an illness most commonly caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). It spreads through saliva (often called the “kissing disease”), but can also spread through shared drinks, utensils, or close contact. Mono is most common in teens and young adults, and less common in younger children.

Common Symptoms

- Severe sore throat (often with swollen tonsils and white coating)
- Extreme fatigue (can last weeks)
- Fever
- Swollen lymph nodes (especially neck)
- Headache or body aches
- Enlarged spleen (sometimes)
- Occasionally enlarged liver

How Is Mono Different From Strep?

Mono is caused by a virus, so:

- Antibiotics do NOT treat mono
- Symptoms often last longer
- Fatigue can persist for several weeks

Because mono and strep can look very similar, testing is often needed. A negative strep test, this does NOT mean they have mono. There are numerous more common throat viruses.

How We Test for Mono

We have two ways to test, depending on timing and symptoms:

Rapid In-Office “Monospot” Test

- Finger-prick blood sample
- Detects active infection
- Most accurate after 7 days of symptoms
- Can have false negatives during the first week. We may wait until day 7 to test.

EBV Antibody Blood Test (Venipuncture)

- Blood draw sent to outside lab
- Measures EBV antibodies
- Determines current, recent, or past infection
- Helpful if symptoms are early or if the diagnosis is unclear.

Home Care for Mono

- Encourage plenty of fluids
- Prioritize rest (fatigue can last weeks)
- Tylenol or ibuprofen for pain/fever
- Warm or cold fluids for throat comfort
- Avoid heavy lifting or rough play

There is no specific medication that cures mono — we treat symptoms until the virus resolves.

School & Activity Restrictions with Mono

When It's Safe to Return to School

- Are fever-free for 24 hours (without medication)
- Feel well enough to participate
- Are staying hydrated

Fatigue may linger — shorter school days or modified workload may temporarily help.

When It's Safe to Return to Sports

Mono can cause spleen enlargement. The spleen sits in the upper left abdomen and helps filter blood. When not enlarged, it is protected from injury by the left rib cage. When enlarged, it is more vulnerable to injury because it can protrude below the rib cage. A hit to the abdomen during contact sports can rarely cause spleen rupture, which is an emergency.

General Activity Guidelines

Weeks 0–3 from symptom onset:

- No contact sports
- No strenuous activity
- No heavy lifting

After 3 weeks:

Light activity may resume if: fever resolved, energy improving, and no abdominal pain

Return to contact sports when

- It's been at least 4 weeks since symptoms began
- Cleared by your provider
- Feeling well without any spleen tenderness

Every case is individualized based on symptoms and exam findings.

When to Go to the Emergency Room (ER)

Seek urgent care for:

- Trouble breathing or swallowing
 - Drooling or inability to handle saliva
 - Severe abdominal pain (especially left upper abdomen)
 - Dizziness or fainting
 - Signs of dehydration
 - Extreme lethargy
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A Final Note

Mono can take time. Fatigue may last several weeks, even after the sore throat improves. Gradual return to normal routines is expected.

We're here to answer any questions and help guide next steps about sports clearance or prolonged symptoms.