



**C**ytomegalovirus, or CMV, is a common virus that can infect people of all ages, usually with no signs or symptoms and no long-term effects. In some cases, CMV symptoms could be mistaken for a cold, but most healthy adults and children will not even realise they have it. However, CMV can be dangerous if a pregnant woman catches it and passes the virus to her unborn child (known as congenital CMV).

Many people come into contact with CMV, especially during childhood, and it is thought that 50 to 80 per cent of adults in

the UK have had CMV at some time during their lives.

Every day, two to three babies – almost 1,000 babies every year – will be damaged by CMV, and it is the leading cause of birth defects in the UK. CMV infection is responsible for around 25 per cent of childhood hearing loss and can cause cerebral palsy, epilepsy, physical impairment,

attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and behavioural and learning disabilities. It can also cause miscarriage or stillbirths.

### Resources

CMV Action offers support, advice and free awareness-raising packs at [cmvaction.org.uk](http://cmvaction.org.uk)

## Take steps against

# CMV

A common virus is the leading cause of birth defects in the UK, yet many know little about it, let alone how to avoid it.

Here's what you need to know.



Despite being 30 times more common than Down's syndrome, toxoplasmosis or listeriosis, CMV is much less well known. While most GPs and midwives will typically advise pregnant women to avoid unpasteurised food or cat litter, few talk about preventative measures to reduce the risk of catching CMV.

### Don't share, wash with care

CMV is spread from one person to another by close contact with bodily fluids such as urine, saliva and tears. It is often passed on through close contact with young children. You can catch CMV by sharing cutlery, glasses and food, and even by touching toys that a child has put in their mouth and then inadvertently putting your hand to your mouth. It cannot be caught merely by being in the same room as them or by cuddling.

Research has shown that women working in childcare, and women with one or more children, are at greater risk of catching CMV in pregnancy. This is because they are more

### Tips for a childcare setting

- Take hygiene precautions to avoid coming into contact with children's bodily fluids
- Men should also take precautions if they have a pregnant partner, to minimise risk
- Avoid sharing dummies, cutlery, drinks or food with anyone
- Avoid kissing babies, toddlers and small children directly on the mouth
- Wash hands regularly with soap and water, especially after changing nappies or coming into contact with bodily fluids
- Consider having plastic gloves that you and other staff can use if required to change nappies or assist children with toileting
- Regularly wash toys and other materials that could be contaminated
- Educate staff about the risks, but reassure them that contact with children without exposure to saliva or urine poses no risk
- It is worth reinforcing all these messages if you, a member of staff or a partner is pregnant.

likely to come into contact with the saliva and urine of a young child.

There is no vaccine currently available for CMV, but the good news is that the virus is killed by washing with soap and water. Simple hygiene precautions can therefore be used to manage risk of infection.

So avoid sharing food, drinks or cutlery with anyone, and, using soap and water, wash hands and any items that have come into contact with bodily fluids – for example after feeding, wiping noses or changing a nappy.

In a childcare setting, this approach should particularly be considered when dealing with dribbling, runny noses and chewed toys, and when feeding or changing babies and young children. Maintaining a clean environment, equipment and surfaces is crucial.

CMV Action advises that all childcare settings should manage the risk of CMV infection by ensuring staff receive information about the virus and the risks it poses – its leaflet *CMV: Your Questions Answered* may be a helpful resource. And, of course, ensure that adequate hygiene precautions are highlighted to minimise the risk of catching it. 