



Infectious mononucleosis and swimming

This fact sheet covers how you can help a swimmer prevent, treat and swim with infectious mononucleosis.

What is infectious mononucleosis?

Infectious mononucleosis (IM) or “glandular fever” commonly affects people aged 15-24. It is caused by an infection, the Epstein-Barr virus, which is transmitted from person to person through body fluids, most commonly saliva. For this reason, IM has become known as “the kissing disease”.

What swimmers need to know about infectious mononucleosis and swimming

Symptoms:

- people are affected differently by IM. Some people may feel a bit under the weather for a couple of weeks, others can be quite ill for several months
- initial symptoms include tiredness and a general sense of feeling unwell alongside a loss of appetite
- after a few days a sore throat, swollen lymph nodes (typically in the neck) and a fever develops.

Treatment:

- antibiotics and antivirals are not recommended treatments for IM
- drinking lots of fluid, getting plenty of rest and taking medication to help with symptoms (e.g. paracetamol) is usually the best advice.

Tips for swimming with infectious mononucleosis

These tips are for swimmer's who want to take part in the sport if suffering with infectious mononucleosis.

Avoid:

- training/competing unless in exceptional circumstances (e.g. in competition where medical advice has been given) until any fever, tiredness and sore throat subsides, this is usually 14 days after they first became ill
- sprinting, diving, tumbleturns, kick sets, land-training and swimming in crowded lanes for a minimum of 21 days after they first became ill once they are feeling well enough to try light aerobic swimming training. This is because in a small number of people with IM, their spleen (a blood-filtering organ situated just below the rib-cage) can become very enlarged and may protrude beyond the rib-cage increasing the possibility of it rupturing, this is very rare but serious
- vigorous exercise, in particularly training which increases the pressure on the abdomen, as well as any situation which may result in being accidentally hit/kicked until at least 21 days after they first became ill. This is because physical examinations by a healthcare professional and ultrasound tests are poor at determining which people with IM have an enlarged spleen as normal size varies enormously
- full participation in contact sports (e.g. water polo or synchronised swimming) for three months after first becoming ill
- sharing water bottles as there is a long incubation period.

Additional advice

General advice on infectious mononucleosis:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/glandular-fever/