What is Mononucleosis?
Mononucleosis (mono) is an infectious viral disease that is most common among adolescents and young adults.

Mono is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), which is a member of the herpes virus family. Because the virus occurs throughout the world it is believed that most people will become infected with it at some point in their lives.

Individuals who become infected with EBV during adolescence or young adulthood are likely to develop infectious mononucleosis 35-50% of the time!

How is Mono spread?
Mono is often referred to as the “kissing disease” because of the strong presence of the virus in saliva and mucous. The virus is usually spread from one person to another through intimate contact with saliva found in the mouth (e.g., kissing) and by sharing drinking glasses, bottles, and cans. Transmission through the air does not normally occur.

What are Some Common Symptoms?
The incubation period from the time of infection to the onset of symptoms is four to seven weeks. Symptoms of mono usually last four weeks and may vary from mild to severe for each infected individual.

Symptoms may include:
• Fever
• Sore throat
• Swollen glands (neck, groin, armpits)
• White patches on the back of the throat
• Fatigue
• Loss of appetite
• Headache
• Spleen and/or liver enlargement
• Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

Are There Any Health Complications Associated with Mono?
One symptom of mono may include an enlarged spleen and sometimes a slightly enlarged liver. Although these enlargements cause few, if any, symptoms in most affected individuals, there is a possibility that the spleen can rupture causing a more serious medical condition. In addition, skin rashes may develop and in rare instances complications, including seizures, various nerve abnormalities, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) or tissues covering the brain (meningitis), may occur.

Note: Strenuous activity, including sports and heavy lifting, should be avoided for 6 – 8 weeks or until released from a health care provider to prevent the spleen from becoming ruptured.

How is Mono Diagnosed?
After visiting with a health care provider, a specific blood test(s) may be ordered. An elevated white blood cell count, an increased percentage of certain atypical white blood cells, and/or a positive reaction to a “mono spot” test may be used to confirm a positive diagnosis.

How is Mono Diagnosed?
Although there is no cure for the mono virus, symptoms can be treated. A health care provider will make recommendations based on the severity of each individual case.

Common recommendations include:
• Rest
• Drink plenty of fluids
• Relieve sore throat symptoms by gargling warm saltwater (6 times/day) and throat lozenges
• Relieve muscle aches, headaches, and fever with acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol)
• Refrain from strenuous activity (including sports) until released by a health care provider
Mono is a virus. Therefore, antibiotics will only be prescribed if a bacterial infection (e.g., strep throat) is present. Some antibiotics will cause a rash if taken when the individual has mono. Antivirals have not shown to have any effect on mono symptoms or duration of illness either.

How Long is Mono Contagious?
There is no definite answer to this question. However, it is presumed that infectivity is highest during the acute stage when there is a higher amount of the virus present in saliva. During the acute stage of illness close, personal contact with an infected individual is discouraged since the virus is more likely to be transmitted. The incubation period from time of exposure to the virus to the time when the symptoms appear is approximately four to seven weeks.

Although it is thought that infectivity is highest during the acute phase, the virus can be excreted in saliva for months to years following an infection. With this in mind there is no definite time table for infectivity; however, during later stages of the illness, when levels of the virus are lower, there is a decrease in the probability of transmission.

How Long Does it Take to Recover?
The symptoms of mono will eventually subside on their own over time; however the length of the illness is unpredictable. Remember that every infected individual may experience different symptoms and the severity can range from mild to severe. It is not uncommon for someone to have mono and recover from it without knowing they were infected. On the other hand, an individual may experience severe symptoms that may require their health care provider to confine them to bed.

Fatigue and weakness may continue for a month or more. Following a health care provider’s recommendations and listening to one’s own body will aid in recovery.

References
• www.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control)
• www.family.org (American Academy of Family Physicians)