

VIRAL MENINGITIS (ASEPTIC MENINGITIS)

WHAT IS VIRAL MENINGITIS?

Viral meningitis is a relatively common illness but rarely is serious. Meningitis is infection of the tissue that covers the brain and spinal cord. Viral meningitis is usually caused by a group of viruses called enteroviruses. Other causes of viral meningitis include: measles, chickenpox, mumps, herpes virus, and West Nile virus. Increases in cases of viral meningitis occur regularly in the summer and fall and are not cause for alarm. Symptoms of viral meningitis are similar to bacterial meningitis, which can be very severe. Persons suspected of having meningitis should be seen by a health care provider to rule out bacterial meningitis.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS:

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Trouble waking up
- Sensitivity to light
- Confusion
- Nausea/vomiting

INCUBATION PERIOD:

Dependent on the virus involved (i.e, incubation for enterovirus is 3 to 7 days).

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

How the infection spreads varies among the viruses that cause viral meningitis. Viral meningitis is most often spread through direct contact with nose/throat discharges or the stool of an infected person.

HOW LONG CAN A PERSON PASS THE INFECTION TO OTHERS?

Contagiousness varies among the viruses that cause viral meningitis. It is usually spread during the time the infected person has symptoms of illness.

PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Report the infection to the local or state health department within 7 days of diagnosis.

CONTROL OF SPREAD:

- *EXCLUSION* is usually not necessary. However, meningitis caused by certain viruses, such as chickenpox, mumps, or measles would require exclusion!
- Suspect cases with diarrhea should be referred to a health care provider.
- Encourage frequent and thorough hand washing.
- Encourage covering of mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Promptly disinfect contaminated surfaces (like eating/drinking utensils) and other commonly touched surfaces (like toys) and doorknobs soiled by secretions. See page 19.
- Please consult with local or state public health about control measures.

TREATMENT:

No specific treatment is available. Health care providers often recommend rest, plenty of fluids, and over-the-counter medications to relieve fever and headaches.