

## PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

# Viral Meningitis

### *What You Need to Know*

#### **What is Viral Meningitis?**

Viral meningitis is an infection of the meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord) and is caused by any one of a number of different viruses. It occurs most often in children; however, anyone can get viral meningitis. Almost all of the cases occur as single, isolated events.

#### **What causes viral meningitis?**

Many different viruses can cause meningitis. About 90% of cases of viral meningitis are caused by members of a group of viruses known as enteroviruses, such as coxsackieviruses and echoviruses. These viruses are more common during summer and fall months. Herpes viruses and the mumps virus can also cause viral meningitis.

#### **What are the signs and symptoms?**

- Sudden fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Fatigue
- Rash
- Sore throat
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

In babies, symptoms are harder to identify. They may include fever, fussiness or irritability, difficulty walking, or refusing to eat.

#### **How long after exposure before Viral Meningitis illness appears?**

Usually within one week from exposure time to appearance of symptoms, but could range from 2 to 21 days, depending on the virus.

#### **How is the virus spread?**

Enteroviruses, the most common cause of viral meningitis, are most often spread through touching secretions from the nose or mouth of an infected person. Spread may also be possible when touching

objects or surfaces contaminated with feces or secretions from the nose or mouth. Most people exposed to enteroviruses will not get viral meningitis.

### **How is viral meningitis diagnosed?**

Viral meningitis is usually diagnosed by laboratory tests of spinal fluid obtained with a spinal tap. The specific cause of viral meningitis can be determined by tests that identify the virus in specimens collected from the patient, but these tests are rarely done.

### **Is there a treatment for Viral Meningitis?**

There is no specific treatment or vaccine for this virus. Parents/guardians should call their healthcare provider

### **Who can get Viral Meningitis?**

The viruses that cause viral meningitis are contagious. Enteroviruses, for example, are very common during the summer and early fall, and many people are exposed to them. However, most infected persons either have no symptoms or develop only a cold or rash with low-grade fever. Only a small proportion of infected persons actually develop meningitis. Therefore, if you are around someone who has viral meningitis, you have a moderate chance of becoming infected, but a very small chance of developing meningitis.

### **How can Viral Meningitis be prevented?**

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water especially after changing diapers and using the bathroom. Wash hands after touching anything that could be contaminated with feces or secretions from the nose or mouth and before preparing food or eating. Your child may need help with hand washing
- Clean dirty surfaces and soiled items like toys and countertops with soap and water, then disinfect with a solution of 2 teaspoons of household bleach to 4 cups of water.
- Seal disposable diapers in a plastic bag and put in a tightly closed garbage can.
- Exclude infected children from day-care or school until fever has disappeared, diarrhea has stopped and child is feeling well enough to participate in regular activities.
- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing. Use tissue or your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues.

**For more information on Viral Meningitis, call (816) 325-7204**

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