

Viral Meningitis Information Sheet

What is Viral Meningitis?

Viral Meningitis is a serious disease but rarely fatal in persons with normal immune systems. It is the most common type of meningitis (inflammation of the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord.)

Most commonly, viral meningitis is caused by an infection with one of several types of viruses, known as enteroviruses. This disease is most often spread through direct contact of respiratory droplets (saliva, or nasal mucus) and can also be spread from the bowel movement of an infected person/child. These viruses are contagious and are more common during the summer and early fall.

What are the symptoms of Viral Meningitis?

The symptoms may not be the same for every person. The most common symptoms include: fever, severe headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to bright lights, drowsiness or confusion, nausea or vomiting. The symptoms last 7 to 10 days and the person recovers completely. Most people infected with an enterovirus have no symptoms or develop only a cold or rash with low-grade fever.

In babies, the symptoms of viral meningitis are more difficult to identify. They may include fever, irritability, difficulty in awakening the baby or the baby refuses to eat.

How can you become infected with Viral Meningitis?

- ❖ By shaking hands with an infected person who has not washed his/her hands properly.
- ❖ By touching something that has been handled with the soiled fingers of an infected person, and then rubbing your nose, mouth or eyes.
- ❖ Small children who are not yet toilet trained spread the virus to others through soiled fingers.
- ❖ Changing diapers of an infected infant.

How can you prevent Viral Meningitis?

- ❖ Wash your own and your children's hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially after going to the bathroom, after changing diapers, before preparing and eating foods or beverages and after close contact with others.
- ❖ Wash your own and children's hands thoroughly with soap and water after sneezing and coughing.
- ❖ In child care centers, wash objects and surfaces with a dilute bleach solution (made by mixing 1 capful of chlorine-containing household bleach with 1 gallon of water.)
- ❖ Avoid sharing items that contact saliva, like straws, drinks, coffee mugs, lip balms or cigarettes.
- ❖ Don't allow young children to share pacifiers or bath water.
- ❖ Make sure swimming pools are well maintained with proper chemical levels.
- ❖ Avoid shared kiddie pools where infectious viruses and bacteria (germs) may be poorly controlled.
- ❖ See your health care provider as soon as possible if you think you or your child has meningitis.

How can you be treated for Viral Meningitis?

No specific treatment for viral meningitis exists at this time. Most persons recover completely on their own, and doctors often may recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids, and medicine to relieve headache and fever. However, you should see your health care provider if you suspect that you or your child has viral meningitis.

*Food handlers and health care workers infected with Viral Meningitis should not work and children should not attend day care/school until seen and treated by a health care provider. If you need more information, please call the Office of Community Health Nursing at **(602) 506-6767**.