



Central Michigan District Health Department

Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities



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Viral (Aseptic) Meningitis

What is Viral Meningitis?

Meningitis is an illness in which there is swelling of the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord. Viral or “aseptic” meningitis, which is the most common type, is caused by an infection with one of several types of viruses. Most 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. While viral meningitis is serious, it is rarely fatal in persons with normal immune systems. Anyone with symptoms of meningitis should see a doctor right away because any type of meningitis can be serious. Only a doctor can determine if someone has meningitis, what is causing it, and the best treatment.

What are the symptoms?

The more common symptoms of meningitis are fever, headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to lights, drowsiness, irritability, lack of appetite or poor eating in an infant, lack of energy, nausea, and vomiting. In babies, the symptoms are more difficult to identify. They may include fever, fretfulness or irritability, difficulty in awakening the baby, or the baby refuses to eat. The symptoms of meningitis may not be the same for every person. Often, the symptoms of viral and bacterial meningitis are the same. Bacterial meningitis can be very serious and result in disability or death if not treated. For this reason, if you think you or your child has meningitis, see your doctor as soon as possible.

How is it spread?

Enteroviruses, the most common cause of viral meningitis, are most often spread through direct contact with respiratory secretions (e.g., saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) of an infected person. This usually happens by shaking hands with an infected person or touching something they have handled, and then rubbing your own nose or mouth. The virus can also be found in the stool of persons who are infected. The virus is spread through this route mainly among small children who are not yet toilet trained. It can also be spread this way to adults changing the diapers of an infected infant.

What is the treatment for Viral Meningitis?

No specific treatment for viral meningitis exists currently. Most patients completely recover on their own in 7 to 10 days. Doctors often will recommend rest, fluids, and medicine to relieve fever and headache.

Please visit us at our website www.cmdhd.org

How can I protect myself?

Most persons who are infected with enteroviruses do not become sick, so it is difficult to prevent the spread of the virus. Adhering to good personal hygiene can help to reduce your chances of becoming infected. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Also, cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.