

VIRAL MENINGITIS

Consult the health department before posting/distributing Parent/Guardian fact sheet.

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.

CAUSE Enteroviruses cause most (about 90%) of the cases in the United States. Occasionally, viral meningitis is also associated with mumps or herpes virus infections. Illnesses caused by enteroviruses (e.g., coxsackie viruses, echoviruses) usually occur in the summer and early fall. Arboviruses, which are carried by mosquitoes, typically cause encephalitis, but can also cause viral meningitis.

SYMPTOMS Start suddenly with fever, headache, stiff neck, fatigue, and rash. Sore throat, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea may also occur. In babies symptoms are harder to identify. They may include fever, fussiness or irritability, difficulty waking, or refusing to eat.

SPREAD Enteroviruses are spread by touching stool or touching secretions from the nose or mouth of an infected person. Spread may also be possible when touching objects or surfaces contaminated with stool or secretions from the nose or mouth. Most people who are exposed to enteroviruses will not get viral meningitis.

INCUBATION Usually within one week from the time a person is exposed until symptoms appear, but could range from 2 to 21 days, depending on the virus.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD For enteroviruses: beginning 3 days after being infected until 10 days after symptoms start and possibly for several weeks after illness (through contact with stool).

EXCLUSION Childcare: Until the fever is gone or diarrhea has stopped and the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

School: None, if the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

DIAGNOSIS Often the symptoms of viral meningitis and bacterial meningitis (meningococcal disease) are similar. While viral meningitis is rarely fatal, bacterial meningitis can be very serious and result in disability or death if not treated promptly. A healthcare provider will make the diagnosis based on clinical symptoms or may perform lab tests.

TREATMENT Recommend parents/guardians call their healthcare provider.

PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues.

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PREVENTION/CONTROL (CONTINUED)

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet, changing diapers, handling anything soiled with stool, and contact with secretions from the nose or mouth and before preparing food or eating. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.**
- DO NOT allow sharing of eating utensils (forks, spoons) and drinking containers (cups, glasses).
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled. Clean and sanitize dishes and silverware after every use.
- Clean and disinfect diapering area and potty chairs after each use and bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys at least daily and when soiled.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Kentucky Department for Public Health Frankfort, KY

Kentucky Regional Poison Center Louisville, KY

Lake Cumberland District Health Department Somerset KY

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Atlanta, GA

<http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/>

EMERGENCY: 1-800-222-1222

www.lcdhd.org (606) 678-4761

Toll free: 1-800-311-3435 www.cdc.gov