

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## MENINGITIS - ASEPTIC (VIRAL)

Meningitis is an inflammation of the thin tissue that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. Viral meningitis, which is the most common type, is caused by an infection with one of several types of viruses. Meningitis can also be caused by infections with several types of bacteria or fungi.

### Symptoms

Common symptoms of meningitis usually develop within 3-7 days and are:

- Severe headache, stiff neck,
- Photophobia (bright lights hurt the eyes)
- Drowsiness, confusion
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever
- Babies may have fever, fretfulness or irritability, difficulty in awakening the baby or refusal to eat.

### Transmission

- The viruses that cause viral meningitis are contagious. Enteroviruses, for example, are very common; however, most infected persons either have no symptoms or develop only a mild cold-like illness or rash with low-grade fever. Typically, less than 1 of every 1000 persons infected actually develops 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.
- The virus may also be found in fluids from an infected person's nose or mouth, as well as the stool (poop). It is usually spread when the virus gets on your hands, and then rubbing your nose, mouth or eyes.
- Other viruses that cause meningitis are coxsackieviruses, echoviruses, herpesviruses and the mumps virus.
- An ill person can usually spread the virus to someone else beginning about three days after he or she is infected until about 10 days after symptoms develop.

### Treatment

- Viral meningitis is usually diagnosed by laboratory tests of spinal fluid obtained with a spinal tap.
- No specific treatment for viral meningitis exists at this time. Most patients recover completely on their own, and doctors often will recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids and medication to relieve the symptoms of fever and headache.
- Viral meningitis is serious but rarely fatal in persons with normal immune systems. Usually, the symptoms last from 7 to 10 days and the person recovers completely. Bacterial meningitis, on the other hand, can be very serious and result in disability or death if not treated promptly. Often, the symptoms of viral meningitis and bacterial meningitis are the same. For this reason, if you think you or your child has meningitis, see your doctor as soon as possible.

### Prevention

- Since most people can carry viruses that cause meningitis without symptoms, it can be difficult to prevent. The most effective method of prevention is to wash your hands thoroughly and often. Avoid sharing items that touch your mouth with other people.
- Vaccines can protect children against some diseases that can lead to viral meningitis.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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