



Viral Meningitis

What is viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is an infection of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. Different viruses can cause meningitis (there are 4 other causes of meningitis besides viruses). The most common types of viruses that cause meningitis are enteroviruses. Other viral infections, such mumps, herpes, influenza, and measles can also cause meningitis.

How does viral meningitis spread?

The different viruses that can cause meningitis are spread in different ways. The most common way they are spread is through direct or indirect contact with saliva or mucus from the nose or lungs of an infected person. The virus can also be spread through fecal contamination. Sometimes, an infected person will not feel sick or have symptoms, but can still spread the virus.

What are the symptoms of viral meningitis?

Meningitis infection is usually characterized by sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck. Other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, and altered mental status could also be present. Symptoms of viral meningitis usually last 7-10 days, go away on their own, and are generally less severe than symptoms caused by bacterial meningitis.

How is viral meningitis prevented?

Vaccines are available to prevent some of the viruses that can cause meningitis (measles, mumps, chickenpox). However, no vaccine is available for the viruses that are the most common cause. Proper hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of viral meningitis. Wash your hands often with warm water and soap. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer can also be used. Avoid kissing or sharing utensils or cups with someone who is, or may be, infected.

School Exclusion Policy:

Children with viral meningitis should not come to school if they have fever over 100 degrees and must be fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medicine.

Resources:

Center for Disease Control & Prevention- <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/viral.html>

Texas Department of State Health Services-

<http://www.dshs.texas.gov/disease/Aseptic-Meningitis/?terms=viral%20meningitis>