Viral (aseptic) Meningitis

What is viral meningitis?
Meningitis is an infection that causes inflammation of the lining that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. Meningitis can be caused by viruses, bacteria or fungi. Viral meningitis is generally less severe than bacterial meningitis.

Which viruses cause meningitis?
Many different viruses can cause meningitis; but most cases are caused by a group called enteroviruses. In many cases the specific virus cannot be identified.

What are the symptoms?
The symptoms may not be the same for every person, but may include:
- Fever
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Drowsiness and/or confusion
- Nausea and vomiting
- Eye sensitivity to light

In babies, symptoms are more difficult to recognize and may also include fretfulness or irritability, and reluctance to eat.

Symptoms generally appear 3 to 7 days after exposure, and last from 7 to 10 days.

Is viral meningitis contagious?
Some of the viruses that cause meningitis are contagious, while others are not. If you are in contact with someone with viral meningitis you may be at risk of becoming infected with the virus that made them sick, but you only have a small chance of developing meningitis as a complication of the illness.

How is it spread?
Different viruses that cause viral meningitis are spread in different ways. Some are spread by contact with an infected person’s stool, or respiratory secretions (coughing/sneezing). The viruses can also stay on surfaces for days and be transferred from objects.

Who gets viral meningitis?
Anyone can get viral meningitis, but it occurs most often in children.

How is viral meningitis diagnosed?
Diagnosis is based on symptoms and laboratory tests of spinal fluid (obtained during a spinal tap) and/or blood.

How is viral meningitis treated?
There is no specific treatment for viral meningitis. Antibiotics do not help viral infections, so they are not useful in the treatment of viral meningitis. Doctors often recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids, and medicine to relieve fever and headache.

A hospital stay may be necessary for more severe cases, or for individuals with weak immune systems. However, most people recover on their own within 2 weeks.

Is there a vaccine available?
No, there is no vaccine for viral meningitis. However, there is a vaccine available for bacterial meningitis.

How can I prevent the spread of meningitis?
- Practice good hygiene and always wash your hands after using the bathroom and before preparing food.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze, and wash your hands afterwards.
- Do not share eating utensils, drink containers, lip stick, or tobacco products.
- Remember to clean and disinfect surfaces frequently touched, but overlooked, such as door handles, light switches, or the TV remote control.
- Keeping your children up-to-date on the recommended childhood immunizations can protect them against those diseases that can lead to viral meningitis (such as mumps and chickenpox).
- Avoiding bites from mosquitoes and other insects that carry diseases that can infect humans may help reduce your risk for viral meningitis.

For further information visit:
http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/about/faq.html

For safe travelling tips:

Report cases to Saint Louis County Department of Public Health by calling: 314-615-1630

Reviewed 09/2015