

Aseptic (Viral) Meningitis

Clinical Description:

Viral meningitis is a disease marked by acute inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord accompanied by symptoms that can include stiff neck, fever, headache, photophobia, vomiting, and fatigue. Most cases of viral meningitis are caused by members of a group of viruses known as enteroviruses. Often cases of viral meningitis are linked to less severe cases of upper respiratory illness and/or rash. Viral meningitis is not particularly contagious, although small clusters of cases can occur in the school setting, usually in the late summer/early fall.

Incubation Period:

The incubation period varies depending on the virus involved. Enteroviral meningitis has an incubation period of 3 - 6 days.

Mode of Transmission:

Transmission, when it does occur, is usually person-to-person by airborne droplets and direct contact with nose and throat discharges. Enteroviral meningitis can also be spread by the fecal-oral route for several weeks after the individual has recovered.

Period of Communicability:

The period of communicability varies depending on the virus.

Exclusion/Reporting:

Almost all cases of viral meningitis are hospitalized during the acute stage of illness. It may be prudent to exclude from school attendance until a complete recovery is made.

Prevention/Care:

- Educate caregiver concerning urgency of receiving medical evaluation.
- Encourage frequent hand-washing and prompt disposal of used tissues.
- Ensure students and staff practice good personal hygiene, especially among groups such as athletic teams where water bottle sharing and other close contact situations are likely.
- Consider sending informational letters to caregivers (sample available from local health or state health departments).

Outbreaks:

According to the ISDH Communicable Disease Reporting Rule (410 IAC 1-2.3) the definition of an outbreak means cases of disease occurring in a community, region, or particular population at a rate in excess of that which is normally expected. The local health department should be notified of suspected and/or documented cases of aseptic meningitis if the number of cases is in excess of what is normally experienced in your school or occur with a common connection (same class, sports team, etc.). For additional information and recommendations regarding the preparation for, and the management of an outbreak situation in a school setting, see Appendix A, "Managing an Infectious Disease Outbreak In a School Setting."

Other Resources:

Indiana State Department of Health Quick Facts Page (found on disease/condition page):

<http://bit.ly/12IJLfD>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/viral.html>