

MSAD # 13 / RSU #83

Health Alert

**Viral Meningitis
Important Notice to Parents**

This illness is typically caused by one of several viruses that are very common during the summer and fall months. It is usually caused by one of the enteroviruses.

Viral meningitis is a serious but rarely fatal illness in persons with normal immune systems. It produces inflammation of the thin tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord. Usually, the symptoms last from 7 to 10 days and the person recovers completely. Symptoms include fever, severe headache, sore throat, stiff neck, bright lights hurting the eyes, drowsiness or confusion, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting. Infants with this illness may have fever, irritability, difficulty waking, or may refuse to eat.

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.

There is no specific treatment for viral meningitis. Most patients recover completely on their own, and doctors often will recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids, and medicine to relieve fever and headache.

The contagious period for viral meningitis is from 3 days before until 10 days after symptoms start. Virus may be in the stool for several weeks.

If your child is infected, it may take from 2 to 21 days for symptoms to start. It usually takes 7 days from the time you are exposed to an infected person until you develop symptoms. Most infected individuals will either have no symptoms or develop only a "cold" like illness or rash with low-grade fever. Only a very small fraction of infected persons actually develop meningitis.

The viruses that typically cause viral meningitis are spread through direct contact with nose or throat secretions (mucus or saliva) of infected persons, or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects such as a drinking glass or telephone. Sneezing and coughing contributes to the spread of the virus germs. To help reduce the spread, cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing, use a tissue or your sleeve, and dispose of used tissues. Adults may also become infected by contamination of the hands with stool from an infected infant or toddler during diaper changes. The most effective way to prevent infection is to wash your hands thoroughly and often.

Ill children should remain home until fever and/or diarrhea is gone and the child is healthy enough for routine activities.

If anyone in your home has symptoms, call your primary care provider. Your doctor may want to test for the virus.

Please contact the school nurse, Mel Chadbourne, RN if you have any questions. More information is also available at the Maine CDC web site.