

INFORMATION PAPER

AFKB-MD

14 August 03

SUBJECT: Viral Meningitis (aseptic meningitis, nonbacterial meningitis)

1. Purpose. To provide a brief overview of viral meningitis

2. Facts.

a. What is viral meningitis? Meningitis is an inflammation of the meninges, the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord. Viral (aseptic) meningitis, the most common form of meningitis, is caused by an infection with one of several types of viruses (enteroviruses, echoviruses and coxsackie viruses).

b. What are the symptoms? The symptoms may include fever, headache, stiff neck, bright lights hurt eyes, drowsiness or confusion, nausea, vomiting and fatigue. These symptoms are often difficult to identify in infants, who may become irritable, lethargic, inconsolable or refuse to eat. Viral meningitis is rarely fatal, unlike bacterial meningitis, which often presents with the same symptoms.

c. How soon do symptoms appear? Symptoms generally appear between 3 to 7 days after exposure. The symptoms usually last 7 to 10 days and the person recovers completely.

d. Who gets viral meningitis? Anyone can get viral meningitis but it occurs most often in children. Most cases occur in late summer and early autumn.

e. Is a person with viral meningitis contagious? Enteroviruses, which cause most cases of viral meningitis, are contagious. Fortunately, most people exposed to these viruses experience mild or no symptoms. Some may develop only a cold or rash with low-grade fever. Most people are exposed to these viruses at some time in their lives. Typically, less than 1 in every 1000 persons infected actually develop meningitis. The viruses that are spread by mosquitoes are rarely spread from person to person. Therefore, if you are around someone with viral meningitis, you have a moderate chance of becoming infected, but a very small chance of developing meningitis.

f. Should a person with viral meningitis be isolated? Strict isolation is not necessary. Since most cases are due to enteroviruses that may be passed in the stool and possibly through respiratory secretions, people diagnosed with viral meningitis should be instructed to thoroughly wash their hands after using the toilet or blowing their noses. The infected person should also cover coughs and sneezes.

g. How is viral meningitis treated? There are no specific medicines or antibiotics used to treat viral meningitis. However, doctors often administer medicines to relieve the fever and headache and recommend bed rest and fluids. Most patients recover completely after 7 to 10 days.

3. When leaders place more emphasis on basic tenants of hygiene, they will effectively limit many related diseases.

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