



Wood County

WISCONSIN

HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

Susan E. Kunferman
DIRECTOR

Meningitis is the inflammation of the meninges, the tissues and fluid covering the brain and spinal cord. Meningitis is usually caused by a virus or a bacterium.

Viral meningitis is the most common but least severe form of meningitis. Patients generally recover from viral meningitis in 7 – 10 days without receiving any treatment and have little or no long-term consequences.

In the United States, especially during the summer months, most viral meningitis cases are caused by enteroviruses. These viruses are most often spread by fecal contamination (e.g., not washing hands properly after using the toilet or changing a diaper and before eating) or by direct contact with respiratory secretions (e.g., saliva, nasal mucus).

You can get viral meningitis at any age. However, some people have a higher risk of getting the disease, including: children younger than 5 years old, and people with weakened immune systems. Babies younger than 1 month old and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to have severe illness.

Common symptoms in babies: fever, irritability, poor eating, sleepiness or trouble waking up from sleep, lethargy (a lack of energy).

Common symptoms in adults: fever, headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to bright light, sleepiness or trouble waking up from sleep, nausea, vomiting, lack of appetite, lethargy.

It is very important to see a healthcare provider right away if you think you or your child might have meningitis; a doctor can determine if you have the disease, the type of meningitis, and the best treatment.

Treatment: 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.

Prevention: There are no vaccines to protect against viral meningitis caused by enteroviruses. You can take the following steps to help lower your chances of getting infected with enteroviruses or spreading them to other people:

- ✓ **Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after changing diapers, using the toilet, or coughing or blowing your nose.**
- ✓ **Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.**
- ✓ **Avoid close contact such as kissing, hugging, or sharing cups or eating utensils with people who are sick.**
- ✓ **Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve, not your hands.**
- ✓ **Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs, especially if someone is sick.**
- ✓ **Stay home when you are sick.**

For more information call the Wood County Health Department at 715-421-8911 or 715-387-8646.