

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INCREASE IN CIRCULATING ENTEROVIRUSES CAUSING VIRAL MENINGITIS September 1, 2017

Although viral meningitis is not a reportable disease in Wisconsin, the Wood County Health Department has been receiving phone calls and inquiries regarding an increase in the number of cases of viral meningitis in the community. The following information may be helpful in better understanding viral meningitis.

What is viral meningitis? Viral meningitis is the most common type of meningitis (inflammation of the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord). It is less severe than bacterial meningitis. Most people get better on their own, without treatment, in about 7-10 days and have little or no long-term consequences. Antibiotics do not help viral infections, so they are not useful in treating viral meningitis.

Causes of viral meningitis: Viral meningitis can be caused by any one of a number of different viruses. In the United States, most viral meningitis cases are caused by non-polio enteroviruses. It is normal to see an increase in circulating enteroviruses from late spring to fall. Only a small number of people who get infected with enteroviruses will actually develop viral meningitis. Outbreaks of viral meningitis are rare.

How viral meningitis spreads: Enteroviruses are most often spread by fecal contamination (e.g., not washing hands properly after using the toilet/changing diapers or before eating) or by direct contact with respiratory secretions (e.g., saliva, nasal mucus, sputum). The viruses can also be spread by contaminated items (e.g., toys).

Those at risk: A person can get viral meningitis at any age. 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.

Symptoms: Fortunately, most people exposed to these viruses experience mild or no symptoms. If symptoms occur, they are most likely within one week of exposure. **Common symptoms in babies** include fever, irritability, poor eating, sleepiness, trouble waking from sleep, and/or lethargy (lack of energy). **Common symptoms in adults** include fever, headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to bright light, sleepiness, trouble waking from sleep, nausea, vomiting, lack of appetite, and/or lethargy. A rash, sore throat, and intestinal symptoms may also occur. It is very important for anyone with symptoms of meningitis to seek medical care right away, because some types of meningitis can be very serious. A health care provider can determine if meningitis is the cause of symptoms, the type of meningitis, and best treatment.

Prevention: There are no vaccines to protect against viral meningitis. Take the following steps to help lower the chances of getting infected and to help prevent spread to others:

- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after changing diapers, using the toilet, 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 coughs and sneezes with a tissue or upper shirt sleeve, not hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs, especially if someone is sick.
- Stay home when sick.

For more information visit <https://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/viral.html> or call the Wood County Health Department at 715-421-8911.