

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources

Information for the Public - Aseptic Meningitis

What is aseptic meningitis?

Meningitis is an illness that has a sudden onset of symptoms, including fever, severe headache, and stiff neck. Aseptic meningitis is usually caused by a virus, more commonly enterovirus, and is different from meningitis caused by bacteria. For this reason, people who are sick with meningitis-like symptoms should see their doctor in order to rule-out a bacterial cause.

Who can get aseptic meningitis?

Anyone can get aseptic meningitis, but the sickness is more often seen in children.

How do you get aseptic meningitis?

Aseptic meningitis is usually caused by enteroviruses, viruses commonly found in respiratory droplets (sneezes, coughs, spit) and stool. The virus can then pass from one person to another by shaking hands with an infected person or touching something that they have handled, and then rubbing your own eyes, mouth, or nose. The viruses can also get on the hands of someone changing an infected baby's dirty diaper, and then be passed to the next person.

How can I keep from getting sick?

WASH YOUR HANDS! Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom and changing diapers. Cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, use only disposable tissues to wipe your nose, and wash your hands after using them. Don't share food and drinks with others, even if they are not sick. There are no vaccines to prevent aseptic meningitis.

When do people get aseptic meningitis?

Late summer and early fall are when most people get sick with aseptic meningitis.

What are the symptoms of aseptic meningitis?

Every person is affected by the viruses in different ways. Common symptoms include sudden onset of fever, stiff neck, severe headache, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat, cold-like symptoms, and muscle aches. More serious infections can cause confusion, sensitivity to bright light, and seizures. Aseptic meningitis is harder to identify in babies, but symptoms can include fever, crying a lot and irritability, difficulty waking the baby, and refusal to eat.

When would I start to feel sick? How long after being sick could I pass it to someone?

Symptoms appear within three to six days after being exposed to the virus. You can pass the virus to others for several weeks after getting the infection, even after you no longer feel sick. Keep in

mind you may not feel sick and could still be passing the virus on to others. This is why it is important to always wash your hands!

How long does aseptic meningitis last?

Most people who get sick with aseptic meningitis usually feel better completely in seven to 10 days.

What should I do if I think I am sick with aseptic meningitis?

SEE YOUR DOCTOR. Your doctor will treat your symptoms by recommending bed rest and drinking plenty of fluids, but there is no specific treatment for aseptic meningitis. Because aseptic meningitis is caused by a virus, antibiotics are useless in treating it, and will not make you feel better. Your doctor will probably also perform special tests to make sure that you do not have a more serious infection. One such test is called a spinal tap, or lumbar puncture. For this test, the doctor takes a sample of the fluid that surrounds your spinal cord and looks for viruses and bacteria, as well as your body's own cells that can give clues to what is making you sick.