

PARENT HANDOUT ON MENINGITIS

VIRAL MENINGITIS

Viral meningitis does not produce severe or potentially dangerous symptoms. It is self limiting and those infected respond to rest, fluids and possibly some anti-viral medications. It is spread by saliva through respiratory, droplet or object contamination.

Symptoms: They include cold symptoms, headache, vomiting, neck or back pain and fever. Symptoms are usually mild and a person may be asymptomatic.

Students do not need to be treated with antibiotics if exposed to someone with viral meningitis. They may return to school when their physician deems them well enough to attend.

BACTERIAL MENINGITIS

Symptoms: Bacterial meningitis can be difficult to detect early, because symptoms mimic a respiratory infection, including cold symptoms, headache, fever, fatigue, and nausea and vomiting. The difference is that rapidly, within hours, a person may become extremely ill with progression into brain swelling. This includes severe headaches, high fever, confusion, irritability, vomiting, and neck pain with arching and eventual coma. Early treatment is important. Diagnosis is made by spinal tap fluid analysis.

Transmission: Meningitis in both forms is contagious, but not as easily contracted as the common cold or flu. Most at risk are those in the same household, those in direct contact with the infected individual's respiratory secretions (like a boyfriend or girlfriend), and those living in close contact (like in dormitories), children in day-care settings, and those with an immune system disorder.

Prevention: There are vaccines to prevent certain types of meningitis. The vaccine is recommended for young children, the elderly and adolescents. Limiting close contact and avoiding respiratory secretions of an infected individual is important. Good and frequent hand-washing is the first defense.

Students may return to school after their physician deems them well enough to attend and when no longer contagious. The Department of Health should be consulted when there is a case of bacterial meningitis for education and reporting regulations.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

Red Book, American Academy of Pediatrics 2006

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