

## **ASEPTIC MENINGITIS Q&A** **(Non-bacterial meningitis, Viral meningitis)**

### ***What is aseptic meningitis?***

Aseptic meningitis is an infection of the meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord) by any one of a number of different viruses. It is a fairly common disease: 150-300 cases are reported each year in Georgia. Almost all of the cases occur as single, isolated events. Outbreaks are rare.

### ***Who gets aseptic meningitis?***

Anyone can get aseptic meningitis but it occurs most often in children.

### ***Which viruses cause this form of meningitis?***

In approximately half of the cases, a specific virus is not identified. In the remaining half, most are due to common gastrointestinal viruses called “enteroviruses.” Occasionally, children have aseptic meningitis associated with mumps or herpes virus infection. Mosquito-borne viruses also account for a few cases each year.

### ***How are the viruses that cause aseptic meningitis spread?***

Because a number of different viruses are capable of causing aseptic meningitis, the manner in which the virus is spread depends upon the type of virus involved. Some are spread by person-to-person contact. Others are spread by insect bites. Still others are spread by food or water contaminated with animal feces.

### ***What are the symptoms of aseptic meningitis?***

The symptoms may include fever, headache, stiff neck and fatigue. Rash, sore throat and intestinal symptoms such as vomiting may also occur. Aseptic meningitis patients are often extremely sensitive to light.

### ***How soon do symptoms appear?***

Symptoms generally appear within one week after exposure.

### ***Is a person with aseptic meningitis contagious?***

Some of the enteroviruses that cause aseptic meningitis are contagious. Others, such as mosquito-borne

viruses, cannot be spread from person to person. Fortunately, most people exposed to these viruses experience mild or no symptoms. Many people are infected with these viruses at some time in their lives, but few actually develop meningitis.

### ***Should a person with aseptic meningitis be isolated?***

Strict isolation is not necessary. Since most cases are due to enteroviruses that may be passed in the stool, people diagnosed with aseptic meningitis should be instructed to thoroughly wash their hands after using the bathroom.

### ***What is the treatment for aseptic meningitis?***

No specific medicines or antibiotics are used to treat aseptic meningitis. Only general supportive care is given.

### ***How can aseptic meningitis be prevented?***

Proper hand washing after using the bathroom can prevent the spread of enteroviruses that cause aseptic meningitis. Hand washing is also important in preventing the spread of meningitis viruses spread by coughing or sneezing. Using insect repellents and wearing protective clothing in insect-infested areas can stop the transmission of viruses spread by insects. Emptying water-filled containers will reduce the number of breeding sites for mosquitoes carrying viruses.

### ***Where can I get additional information on aseptic meningitis?***

Contact the Georgia Division of Public Health, Epidemiology Branch, by email at [gaepinfo@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:gaepinfo@dhr.state.ga.us). The following web site may be useful:

- CDC Viral Meningitis Fact Sheet – <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/virlmen.htm>