



Tarrant County Public Health

Safeguarding Our Community's Health

The Facts about Meningitis

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is a condition that causes inflammation of the tissues covering the brain and the spinal cord. It may be caused by several different germs. The illness can cause serious health problems like blindness, deafness, paralysis, permanent brain damage or even death. With treatment most people recover fully.

What are the symptoms?

Adults:

Symptoms include: fever, severe headache, neck stiffness, nausea that can lead to vomiting, drowsiness or confusion, and eye pain from bright lights.

Children:

Symptoms include: fever that is not easily lowered with Tylenol, nervousness or irritability. An infant may be difficult to awaken or refuse to eat. An infant with a fever of 101° F or more and who cannot be easily awakened should be seen by a doctor.

How is it spread?

Enteroviruses, the most common cause of viral meningitis, most often spread through fecal contamination (which can occur when changing a diaper or using the toilet and not properly washing hands afterwards). Enteroviruses can also be spread through respiratory secretions (saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) of an infected person. Contact with an infected person may increase your chance of becoming infected with the virus that made them sick; however you will have a small chance of developing meningitis as a complication of the illness.

Bacterial meningitis, such as neisseria meningitidis, Hib (Haemophilus influenza B), and streptococcus pneumonia (pneumococcal) is generally spread to people who live in the same household, attend the same day care center or have direct contact with an infected person's oral secretions like saliva.

How is it treated?

Viral meningitis has no specific treatment at this time. Most patients completely recover. Doctors recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids and medicine to relieve fever and headache.

Bacterial meningitis is treated with antibiotics. There are some vaccines available for some forms of bacterial meningitis.

What precautions should I take when traveling?

Risk to travelers is generally low and cases are rare. Learn about any incidences of the illness in the specific area where you plan to travel. Your risk increases with long-term contact with local populations where the illness is present. For specific information on certain geographical areas that you are traveling, contact your local public health department.

For more information, call 817-321-4700 or visit <http://health.tarrantcounty.com>

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