



Thunder Bay District
Health Unit

THE FACTS: Viral Meningitis

What is it?

Meningitis is an inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord. Many different germs are capable of causing the infection. Some of these germs are viruses and some are bacteria and are most common in the community in late summer or early autumn. These viruses frequently infect many children and adults at the same time but few will develop meningitis. The meningitis resolves on its own usually without any complications.

How is it Diagnosed?

Viruses may be diagnosed by testing blood, spinal fluid, throat washings or stool.

What are the Symptoms?

Viral meningitis is an infection that causes swelling of the lining of the brain. Symptoms may vary but most experience fever, headache, neck pain or stiffness, painful eyes when looking at a bright light, nausea, vomiting, poor appetite, tiredness and sleepiness. The virus may also affect other parts of the body and cause symptoms such as skin rash, runny nose, sore throat, earache, cough, difficulty breathing and diarrhea. People with viral meningitis almost always get completely well without treatment. Antibiotics have no effect for viral meningitis.

How is it Spread?

The viruses spread easily from one person to another when people cough, sneeze or kiss. The virus is also carried in the stool and is spread from one person to another on the hands of an infected person.

How is the Spread of Meningitis Prevented?

- Frequent hand washing, covering one's mouth when coughing or sneezing and throw away any used tissues.
- In general, people should not share anything that has been in their mouth.
- Stay away from school or work until feeling better.

**For Further Information Contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.**

