

**From:** Ross Doman  
**To:** Doman, Ross  
**Date:** 7/15/2005 3:55:40 PM  
**Subject:** RELEASE FROM THE WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

July 15, 2005

\*\*\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \*\*\*

### **Wyoming Department of Health Investigating Viral Meningitis Cases in Uinta County**

CHEYENNE - Officials from the Wyoming Department of Health and the Uinta County Health Department today said that they are investigating three confirmed cases of viral meningitis and two more possible cases, all out of Uinta County. The three confirmed cases were in adults, including one male and two females. They were each hospitalized and are recovering, said Merrillee Francom, a public health nurse from Uinta County.

Earlier this month two youth from Sweetwater County were also confirmed with viral meningitis and they have recovered, she said.

Meningitis is an illness in which there is inflammation of the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord. Viral or "aseptic" meningitis, which is the most common type, is caused by an infection with one of several types of viruses. Meningitis can also be caused by infections with several types of bacteria or fungi. In the United States, there are between 25,000 and 50,000 hospitalizations due to viral meningitis each year.

"While it is not an uncommon disease in Wyoming, five cases in one week from the same county may be fairly significant," said Dr. Tracy Murphy, the State Epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health. In the past several years numbers have been relatively low in the state except for 2003, when a rise may have been connected to the high number of people with West Nile virus discovered here, he said.

Murphy said that because most persons who are infected with viral meningitis do not become sick, it can be difficult to prevent the spread of the virus. However, routinely adhering to good personal hygiene can help to reduce the chances of becoming infected.

"If you are in contact with someone who has viral meningitis, the most effective method of prevention is to wash your hands thoroughly and often," he said.

Also, cleaning contaminated surfaces and soiled articles first with soap and water, and then disinfecting them with a dilute solution of chlorine-containing bleach (made by mixing approximately ¼ cup of bleach with 1 gallon of water) can be a very effective way to inactivate the virus, especially in institutional settings such as child care centers.

The more common symptoms of meningitis are fever, severe headache, stiff neck, bright lights hurting the eyes, drowsiness or confusion, and nausea and vomiting. In babies, the symptoms are more difficult to identify. They may include fever, fretfulness or irritability, difficulty in awakening the baby, or the baby refuses to eat. The symptoms of meningitis may not be the same for every person.

"Above all, if people are experiencing these symptoms and think they may be suffering from viral meningitis they should contact their healthcare provider as soon as possible," Murphy said.

Confirmed Viral Meningitis cases reported in Wyoming in recent years include:

2005 (to date): 5 cases (2 in Sweetwater County and 3 in Uinta County)

2004: 8 confirmed (1 in Fremont County, 3 in Sheridan County, 4 in Sweetwater County)

2003: 25 confirmed (10 in Albany County, 1 in Fremont County, 2 in Laramie County, 1 in Natrona County, 9 in Sweetwater County, 2 in Uinta County)

2002: 8 confirmed (1 in Albany County, 1 in Fremont County, 1 in Laramie County, 1 in Platte County, 2 in Sheridan County, 2 in Sweetwater County)

2001: 6 confirmed (all from Sheridan County)

2000: 0

.....

### **Viral Meningitis Fact Sheet:**

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an illness in which there is inflammation of the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord. Viral or "aseptic" meningitis, which is the most common type, is caused by an infection with one of several types of viruses. Meningitis can also be caused by infections with several types of bacteria or fungi. In the United States, there are between 25,000 and 50,000 hospitalizations due to viral meningitis each year.

What are the symptoms of meningitis?

The more common symptoms of meningitis are fever, severe headache, stiff neck, bright lights hurting the eyes, drowsiness or confusion, and nausea and vomiting. In babies, the symptoms are more difficult to identify. They may include fever, fretfulness or irritability, difficulty in awakening the baby, or the baby refuses to eat. The symptoms of meningitis may not be the same for every person.

Is viral meningitis a serious disease?

Viral ("aseptic") meningitis is serious but rarely fatal in persons with normal immune systems. Usually, the symptoms last from 7 to 10 days and the patient recovers completely. Bacterial meningitis, on the other hand, can be very serious and result in disability or death if not treated promptly. Often, the symptoms of viral meningitis and bacterial meningitis are the same. For this reason, if you think you or your child has meningitis, see your doctor as soon as possible.

What causes viral meningitis?

Many different viruses can cause meningitis. About 90% of cases of viral meningitis are caused by members of a group of viruses known as enteroviruses, such as coxsackieviruses and echoviruses. These viruses are more common during summer and fall months. Herpes viruses and the mumps virus can also cause viral meningitis.

How is viral meningitis diagnosed?

Viral meningitis is usually diagnosed by laboratory tests of spinal fluid obtained with a spinal tap. The specific cause of viral meningitis can be determined by tests that identify the virus in specimens collected from the patient, but these tests are rarely done.

How is viral meningitis treated?

No specific treatment for viral meningitis exists at this time. Most patients completely recover on their own. Doctors often will recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids, and medicine to relieve fever and headache.

How is the virus spread?

Enteroviruses, the most common cause of viral meningitis, are most often spread through direct contact with respiratory secretions (e.g., saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) of an infected person. This usually

happens by shaking hands with an infected person or touching something they have handled, and then rubbing your own nose or mouth. The virus can also be found in the stool of persons who are infected. The virus is spread through this route mainly among small children who are not yet toilet trained. It can also be spread this way to adults changing the diapers of an infected infant. The incubation period for enteroviruses is usually between 3 and 7 days from the time you are infected until you develop symptoms. You can usually spread the virus to someone else beginning about 3 days after you are infected until about 10 days after you develop symptoms.

Can I get viral meningitis if I'm around someone who has it?

The viruses that cause viral meningitis are contagious. Enteroviruses, for example, are very common during the summer and early fall, and many people are exposed to them. However, most infected persons either have no symptoms or develop only a cold or rash with low-grade fever. Only a small proportion of infected persons actually develop meningitis. Therefore, if you are around someone who has viral meningitis, you have a moderate chance of becoming infected, but a very small chance of developing meningitis.

How can I reduce my chances of becoming infected?

Because most persons who are infected with enteroviruses do not become sick, it can be difficult to prevent the spread of the virus. However, adhering to good personal hygiene can help to reduce your chances of becoming infected. If you are in contact with someone who has viral meningitis, the most effective method of prevention is to wash your hands thoroughly and often. Also, cleaning contaminated surfaces and soiled articles first with soap and water, and then disinfecting them with a dilute solution of chlorine-containing bleach (made by mixing approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of bleach with 1 gallon of water) can be a very effective way to inactivate the virus, especially in institutional settings such as child care centers.

- end -

For more information, please contact:

Dr. Tracy Murphy, State Epidemiologist, Wyoming Department of Health, (307) 421-1188

Merrilee Francom, Public Health Nurse, Uinta County, (307) 787-3800

Ross Doman, Public Information Officer, Wyoming Department of Health, (307) 631-0699