March 26, 2013

Aseptic Meningitis Fact Sheet

1. **What is aseptic meningitis (AM)? -** AM refers to a viral infection of the meninges (a system of membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord). It is a fairly common disease, however, almost all cases occur as an isolated event, and outbreaks are rare.

2. **Who gets AM? -** Anyone can get AM but it occurs most often in children.

3. **What viruses cause this form of meningitis? -** Approximately half of the cases of AM in the United States are caused by common intestinal viruses (enteroviruses). Occasionally, children develop AM associated with either mumps or herpes virus infection. Mosquito-borne viruses: e.g. WNV also account for a few cases each year in Pennsylvania. In most cases, the specific virus is never identified.

4. **How are viruses that cause AM spread? -** In the absence of a specific laboratory diagnosis of the causative AM virus, it is difficult to implement targeted prevention measures as some are spread person-to-person while others are spread by insects.

5. **What are the symptoms? -** They include fever, headache, stiff neck and fatigue. Rash, sore throat and intestinal symptoms may also occur.

6. **How soon do symptoms appear? -** Generally appear within one week of exposure.

7. **How is AM diagnosed?** – The only way to diagnose AM is to collect a sample of spinal fluid through a lumbar puncture (also known as a spinal tap).

8. **Is a person with AM contagious?** – While some of the enteroviruses that may cause AM are potentially contagious person to person, others, such as mosquito-borne viruses, cannot be spread person to person.

9. **Should a person with AM be isolated? -** Since most cases of AM are due to enterovirus infection that may be passed in the stool, people with AM should be instructed to thoroughly wash their hands after using the toilet. Isolation is not necessary.

10. **How is AM treated? -** There are no specific medicines used to treat AM.

11. **For more information about Aseptic Meningitis**:
http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/viral.html

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician for specific clinical information.