



Dear Parents:

School districts in Oklahoma are required by law to provide information about the health risk of meningococcal meningitis to parents and guardians of students. **This letter is being sent only as a public service and means of public education.**

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid of a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. People sometimes refer to it as spinal meningitis. Meningitis is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection. Knowing whether meningitis is caused by a virus or bacterium is important because the severity of illness and the treatment differ.

High fever, headache, and stiff neck are common symptoms of meningitis in anyone over the age of 2 years. These symptoms can develop over several hours, or they may take 1 to 2 days. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, discomfort looking into bright lights, confusion, and sleepiness.

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. One of the most common transfers at schools is drinking after an infected person. 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.

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.

There is a vaccination; we encourage contacting your private physician or the Oklahoma Health Department for more information.