



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 25, 2007

Health district identifies increase in viral meningitis

LAS VEGAS – The Southern Nevada Health District’s Office of Epidemiology has identified an increase in the number of reports of viral meningitis cases related to a common virus that frequently occurs in the summer and fall. The virus is circulating in the community among children, teens and adults. This increase indicates that there could be more as yet unidentified illnesses in the community. To eliminate the spread of virus that can cause viral meningitis, as well as other viral infections like influenza, the health district reminds the community to follow healthy hygiene practices such as thorough hand washing, covering your mouth and nose when you sneeze and cough, and staying home if you are sick.

Meningitis is an infection of the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord that can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or fungi. Viral meningitis is the most common type of meningitis and is the least serious. The local cases are the result of enterovirus, a common virus that causes an estimated 10-15 million cases of gastrointestinal and respiratory diseases in the United States each year and occasionally causes viral meningitis. Most people who are infected with enterovirus do not develop meningitis because the tissues of the brain and spinal cord are well protected from infection. Enterovirus infections commonly occur in the summer and fall in the United States.

Although anyone can get viral meningitis, it occurs more commonly in young children, especially those under a year old. It is most often a mild disease and most people recover completely in about 10 days. Viral meningitis is not generally spread from person-to-person; however, the viruses that cause the illness are common and might be spread through contact with an infected person’s saliva, sputum, nasal secretions or feces.

Symptoms of viral meningitis vary and can include headache, fever, stiff neck, and sensitivity to light. Symptoms appear between three and seven days following exposure. There are no specific treatments for viral meningitis as antibiotics are not effective against the illness. Physicians generally recommend bed rest and fluids; they might prescribe medication to relieve the headache and fever. Sometimes, viral meningitis can require hospitalization. In the United States, approximately 25,000 to 50,000 hospitalizations occur annually.

If an individual is experiencing symptoms, it is recommended that he or she seek medical attention from a physician, healthcare provider, or emergency department as soon as possible to determine what is causing the symptoms. There are more severe bacterial forms of meningitis that can be treated with antibiotics.

For more information, visit the Southern Nevada Health District website, www.SouthernNevadaHealthDistrict.org or call the Office of Epidemiology, (702) 759-1300.

-30-

MEDIA CONTACTS

Jennifer Sizemore: Sizemore@snhdmail.org | 702.759.1225

Stephanie Bethel: Bethel@snhdmail.org | 702.759.1393