



Board of Chosen Freeholders  
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September 27, 2007

Good evening. This is Nancy Ward, Assistant Superintendent of Schools. I am calling with our final message providing you with the latest information regarding the students who have recently become ill. The Salem County Health Department has worked with the medical professionals on the state level to help us determine the nature and cause of the recent illnesses.

Three sets of lab results have come in and have identified Coxsackie virus A-9 as the virus linked to these illnesses. This is a type of enterovirus. Infections with Coxsackie virus can occur at any time, but are more common in warm weather.

The control measures put in place by the school as well as the practices of good hygiene by students and staff has helped to control the spread of this virus.

Actions taken by the school to address the recent health concerns are as follows:

- We ended the practice of all football players using shared water bottles. Each player has been given his own water bottle to use. A directive has been given to all coaches to use individual water bottles and not have athletes share them.
- All four schools were given information about hygiene and healthy habits to prevent communicable diseases.
- The Salem County Health Department provided the district with hand sanitizer and good hygiene posters. The sanitizer was given to all students in the middle and high schools. Olivet and Norma School will also receive sanitizer. The posters were placed in all school buildings.
- The custodial staff has checked lavatories to ensure that the soap and paper dispensers are maintained at adequate levels.
- Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed in each classroom as well as other areas around the schools.
- We continue to follow the guidelines of the Salem County Health Department. Please contact them with specific questions.

Remember, hand washing is the best protection! As a reminder, it is important to avoid sharing eating and drinking utensils, to wash your hands frequently, and seek medical attention if you or your child becomes ill, especially with fever, headache or stiff neck.

Remaining lab results continue to be processed. They are not "quick tests" that give immediate results through a chemical reaction. It involves actually growing the virus. These results usually take 7-10 days for the final results to be obtained.

Normal school business continues as we work together with the Salem County Health Department to monitor those who are recovering as well as identify the end of the spread



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of this illness. We do not anticipate a need to communicate you with you again because we now have a root cause that is defined, treatable and preventable.

Good Evening.



## Coxsackievirus (PUBLIC HANDOUT)

### What is coxsackievirus?

- Coxsackievirus is an enterovirus that lives in the digestive tract.
- It can occur at anytime, but it is more common in warm weather

### What are the signs and symptoms of coxsackievirus?

The most common symptoms:

- High Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Neck stiffness
- Sore throat
- Abdominal discomfort
- Nausea

**Coxsackievirus can also cause several different symptoms that affect different parts of the body, including:**

- **Hand, foot, and mouth disease**, a type of coxsackievirus syndrome, causes painful red blisters in the throat and on the tongue, gums, hard palate, inside of the cheeks, and the palms of hands and soles of the feet.
- **Herpangina**, an infection of the throat which causes red-ringed blisters and ulcers on the tonsils and soft palate, the fleshy back portion of the roof of the mouth.
- **Hemorrhagic conjunctivitis**, an infection that affects the whites of the eyes. Hemorrhagic conjunctivitis usually begins as eye pain, followed quickly by red, watery eyes with swelling, light sensitivity, and blurred vision.

**Occasionally, coxsackieviruses cause more serious infections that may need to be treated in a hospital, including:**

- **Viral Meningitis**, an infection where the tissue that covers the brain and spinal cord become swollen.
- **Encephalitis**, a brain infection.
- **Myocarditis**, an infection of the heart muscle.

### Are coxsackieviruses contagious?

- Coxsackieviruses are very contagious.
- The virus spreads easily in group settings such as schools, daycares, or summer camps.
- Those infected are most contagious the first week they're sick.



## **Coxsackievirus**

### **(PUBLIC HANDOUT)**

#### **How are coxsackieviruses spread?**

- Coxsackieviruses can be passed from person to person
- This usually happens by unwashed hands and surfaces contaminated by feces.
- The viruses can also be spread through the air when someone sneezes or coughs.
- The duration of coxsackievirus infection varies widely. For coxsackie fever without other symptoms, a child's temperature may return to normal within 24 hours, although the average fever lasts 3 to 4 days. Hand, foot, and mouth disease usually lasts for 2 or 3 days, while viral meningitis can take 3 to 7 days to clear up.

#### **How are coxsackieviruses treated?**

- Depending on the type of infection and symptoms, the doctor may prescribe medications to make your child feel more comfortable.
- Antibiotics can't be used to fight a coxsackievirus infection because they only work against bacteria.
- Acetaminophen may be given to relieve any minor aches and pains.
- Most children with a simple coxsackievirus infection recover completely after a few days without needing any treatment.
- A child who has a fever without any other symptoms should rest in bed or play quietly indoors.
- Offer plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- If a fever lasts for more than 24 hours or if your child has any symptoms of a more serious coxsackievirus infection, call your doctor.

#### **How can I reduce my chances of becoming infected?**

- Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent coxsackievirus infection.
- Keeping good personal hygiene can help reduce a person's chance of becoming infected. Some examples would be:
  - Washing your hands
  - Covering your mouth and nose when you sneeze
  - Avoid sharing personal items such as water bottles, eating utensils, etc.
- If you are in contact with someone who has coxsackievirus infection, the best way to preventing the spread of the disease is to wash your hands thoroughly and often.
- When you are sick, stay home!



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department

## Meningococcal Disease (Viral)

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)



### What is meningitis?

- Meningitis is a disease where the tissue that covers the brain and spinal cord become swollen.
- Viral meningitis is the most common type of meningitis.
- Viral meningitis is caused by an infection with one of many different types of viruses or bacteria/fungi.

### What are the symptoms of meningitis?

The most common symptoms:

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Tiredness
- Stiff neck
- Bright lights hurting the eyes
- Drowsiness or confusion
- Nausea and vomiting

In babies, symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Fussiness or irritability
- Difficulty in awakening the baby
- Baby refuses to eat

Symptoms of meningitis may not be the same for every person.

### Is viral meningitis a serious disease?

- Viral meningitis is serious but rarely fatal in persons with normal immune systems.
- Usually symptoms last from 7 to 10 days and patient recovers completely.
- If you think your child has meningitis, see your doctor as soon as possible.

### What causes viral meningitis?

- Many different viruses can cause meningitis.
- Viral meningitis is a type of meningitis that is common in the summer and early fall and is usually caused by a stomach virus.

### How is viral meningitis diagnosed?

- Viral meningitis is usually diagnosed by lab tests of spinal fluid taken through a spinal tap.

### How is viral meningitis treated?

- There is no specific treatment for viral meningitis at this time. But remember, most people recover completely.

Last Updated: 9/14/07



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department

## Meningococcal Disease (Viral)

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)



### How does the virus spread?

- Viral meningitis is most often spread through direct contact with 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 by rubbing your own nose or mouth.
- The virus is also spread in the stool of people who are infected. The virus is spread this way mainly among small children who are not toilet trained. It can also be spread this way to adults changing diapers of an infected infant.
- It is usually between 3 to 7 days from the time you are infected until you show symptoms.

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

- The viruses that cause viral meningitis are contagious.
- However, most infected persons either have no symptoms or develop only a cold or rash with a low-grade fever.
- Only a small number 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 do not become sick, it can be difficult to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Keeping good personal hygiene can help reduce a person's chance of becoming infected. Some examples would be:
  - Washing your hands
  - Covering your mouth and nose when you sneeze
- If you are in contact with someone who has viral meningitis, the most effective way of preventing the spread of the disease is to wash your hands thoroughly and often.
- When you are sick, stay home!

Last Updated: 9/14/07



# Healthy Habits for Back to School

Remember these simple tips for a healthy school year!

- Do not share eating or drinking utensils with fellow students
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or upper sleeve, when coughing or sneezing
- Properly wash your hands!
  - \* Rub hands together vigorously with soap and water
  - \* Cover all parts of your hands and don't forget your wrists
  - \* Continue for 20 seconds
  - \* Rinse
  - \* Dry hands using a paper towel or air dryer
  - \* **Remember if hand washing facilities are not available, use an alcohol based wipe or gel.\***
- Wash your hands throughout the day
  - \* Before you eat
  - \* After contact with body fluids
  - \* After using the bathroom
  - \* After being around someone who is sick
  - \* Whenever they look dirty
- Stay home when you are sick

## Facts to Think About

Approximately 1/5 of the U.S. population attends or works in schools. (U.S. Dept of Ed, 1999).

Nearly 22 million school days are lost annually due to the common cold alone. (CDC, 1996)

Students need to get plenty of sleep and physical activity, drink water, and eat good food to help them stay healthy in the winter and all year.



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## Actions taken to address the recent health concerns:

### Last week

- Initial contact was made to the Salem County Department of Health when the first "possible" diagnosis was reported to the school. At that time they became the lead agency for information and investigation.
- A Connect-ed phone call was made to the high school parents to inform them of the potential diagnosis and procedures that were being taken.
- We immediately ended the practice of all football players using shared water bottles. Each player has been given his own water bottle to use. A directive has been given to all coaches to use individual water bottles and not have athletes share them.
- A fact sheet with pertinent information about Viral Meningitis was distributed initially to the football team and subsequently to all student athletes.
- Two automated phone messages to district families and staff regarding the health concerns, facts about the disease and prevention as well as contact information were completed on September 14 and 17. The text of those messages is also posted on the district website.
- The health messages and Fact Sheet from the Department of Health are posted on the district web site. Paper copies have been distributed to all staff and to the municipality.
- Both TV and print media were given facts as directed by the Department of Health with Q & A as appropriate. The school district intentionally cooperated with the press and provided information so as to facilitate publication of pertinent information in order to prevent and contain the disease.

### New this week

- All four schools were given information about hygiene and healthy habits to prevent communicable diseases. This information was provided to the teachers and students via the school health offices. It was also provided to the bus drivers.
- The Department of Health has provided the district with hand sanitizer and good hygiene posters. The sanitizer was given to all students in the middle and high schools. The posters were placed in all school buildings.
- The custodial staff has checked lavatories to ensure that the soap and paper dispensers are maintained at adequate levels.
- We continue to follow the guidelines of the Department of Health.