



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **VIRAL MENINGITIS CASES INCREASE IN REGION**

*Public Can Take Steps To Help Prevent Spread of Disease*

There has been a 70 percent increase in the number of viral meningitis cases in San Diego County since January 2003, the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) reports.

As of Tuesday, Aug. 12, 316 cases of viral meningitis were reported in the county, compared to 186 in 2002 during the same period. Although meningitis can be caused by a number of viruses, including West Nile virus (WNV), there is no indication that WNV is related to the increase in cases.

“The number of cases can vary from year to year,” said Dr. Michele Ginsberg, chief epidemiologist, HHSA. “In the past 10 years, cases in San Diego County have ranged from a high of 513 in 1998 to 97 in 1996.”

Viral meningitis is serious but rarely fatal. It is typically milder than bacterial meningitis. Symptoms include fever, severe headache, stiff neck, pain upon looking at bright lights, drowsiness or confusion, and nausea and vomiting. Anyone exhibiting these symptoms should contact their physician immediately.

About 90 percent of viral meningitis cases are caused by members of a group of viruses known as enteroviruses. Enteroviruses are usually spread through direct contact with respiratory secretions (such as saliva, sputum or nasal mucus) of an infected person. The virus also can be found in the stool of infected persons.

Recommendations to help prevent viral meningitis include:

- Frequent hand washing with soap or alcohol based cleanser:
  - After using the bathroom and changing diapers
  - Before preparing food and eating food
  - After covering coughs and sneezes
- Avoid sharing drinks (cans, cups or bottles) and towels with another person

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