

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia®



VACCINE EDUCATION CENTER

Enterovirus D68: What You Should Know

Recent reports of widespread enterovirus D68 infections have led to many questions and concerns among parents and other community members. While the current situation continues to change and be updated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this sheet is meant to provide you with some basic information about the virus and its transmission.

Q. What is enterovirus?

A. Enteroviruses are a family consisting of more than 100 different viruses. Each year in the United States they cause millions of infections and tens of thousands of hospitalizations. Many enterovirus infections result in respiratory symptoms, but some types cause meningitis or encephalitis (swelling of the brain and spinal cord). And in some cases, enterovirus infections do not cause any noticeable symptoms.

Q. Why is enterovirus D68 causing infections this year?

A. Enterovirus D68 (EV-D68) has been identified as a cause of small numbers of infections regularly since 1962; however, this year, the number of cases is greater than usual. Also known as human enterovirus 68 (HEV-68) or human rhinovirus 87 (HRV-87), this type most typically causes respiratory symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, sneezing, cough and achiness. In more severe cases, people may experience wheezing or difficulty breathing. In a very small number of cases, EV-D68 has led to meningitis, encephalitis or paralysis.

Because respiratory symptoms are caused by a number of infections, it is important to realize that not everyone with a cough and runny nose is infected with enterovirus D68. If you have these symptoms, stay home, drink plenty of fluids and, if needed, take over-the-counter medications for pain or fever. If wheezing or difficulty breathing develops or symptoms continue to worsen, seek medical attention. If children are ill, do not give them aspirin.

Q. Who is at risk?

A. Anyone can be infected with enterovirus D68; however, children and young adults are most often symptomatic. People with asthma may be more likely to suffer severe symptoms that include wheezing or difficulty breathing.

Q. How is the virus spread?

A. Enteroviruses are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or by touching an infected surface and then touching one's face.

Q. Is there a vaccine?

A. No. A vaccine is not available to protect against EV-D68.

Q. How can my family stay healthy?

A. You can reduce the chance of being infected by practicing good hygiene, such as washing your hands often, avoiding touching your face, staying away from people who are sick and staying away from others if you are sick, covering coughs and sneezes, and frequently cleaning surfaces and objects that are touched by many people.

Information provided by the Vaccine Education Center at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

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