



June 22, 2007

TO: 4-H Parents and 4-H Camping Staff

FROM: Debbie McDonald, State 4-H Program Leader

I want to give you an update on a health issue that we managed during our Older Members' Conference camp at WVU Jackson's Mill State 4-H Camp, Weston. I hope this letter and the attached Q&A will help to answer any questions or concerns you have and provide factual information. Our first concern in all of our camps is for the health and safety of our campers and staff, and I was very proud of all participants for the way they handled this situation.

On June 19, a 14-year-old camper at Jackson's Mill became ill. She was hospitalized and diagnosed with viral meningitis. On June 21, the camper was released from WVU Children's Hospital. She is recovering at home. Health officials continue to assure everyone that the illness is not considered a serious public health risk.

The teenager also attended 4-H camp in Greenbrier County June 11 – 15. To date, no one from either camp has reported any symptoms of the illness.

When we learned of the diagnosis, we worked very quickly to provide campers, staff, and parents with the information that we had in order to minimize rumors and alarm. We set up a hotline for parents to call with additional questions. Most had only a few additional questions. Only one camper out of 300 decided to go home, and he did not have any symptoms of the illness.

Some parents and campers who attended 4-H camp with this young woman have expressed concern that they may carry the illness home with them when they leave Jackson's Mill. They asked if they are putting family and friends at risk.

The answer is "no." Health experts assure us that campers and their families should not be concerned.

Dr. Marty Weisse, WVU pediatric infectious disease specialist, says viral meningitis does not occur in epidemics, and *people who had close contact with this patient are not considered at higher risk for developing meningitis.*

Meningitis can have various causes. The kind that alarms public health officials is caused by bacteria, not by the virus that caused the Jackson's Mill case.

West Virginia State Epidemiologist Dr. Loretta Haddy says that viral meningitis is not considered a serious public health risk. In fact, the West Virginia Department of Health does not even require that such cases be reported.

The virus that can cause this type of meningitis is common throughout West Virginia, though it rarely leads to meningitis. Parents are urged to be aware of the possible symptoms of meningitis, and to seek treatment if necessary. Symptoms include a combination of stiff neck, severe headache, high fever, nausea, and sore throat.

However, medical experts say there is no need for a person without symptoms to limit contact with others out of concern for spreading the illness. Health officials reiterate that adhering to good personal hygiene can help to reduce the chances of becoming infected with this or other illnesses. And, Jackson's Mill facilities are regularly and thoroughly cleaned according to public health guidelines.

You can find additional information about meningitis at www.cdc.gov.

If you have other questions, please feel free to call WVU Jackson's Mill at (304) 269-5100 and leave a message. We will respond.

We appreciate your confidence and trust in our 4-H program. We truly enjoy having your children grow and learn and have healthy fun in camps across the state.