



Fact Sheet: Viral Meningitis

What is Viral Meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord. Bacteria or viruses can cause it, but viral meningitis is more common, rarely serious, and usually causes fewer long-lasting problems than the bacterial form. Many different viruses can cause viral meningitis.

What are the symptoms?

- Severe headache
- Stiff neck and back
- Vomiting/nausea
- Sudden fever
- Irritability
- Sometimes a rash
- Intolerance of bright light
- Drowsiness or confusion

Symptoms seldom last longer than 10 days.

How is it spread?

Viral meningitis is caused by a large number of different viruses, many of which are passed to others through coughing and sneezing. Some viruses are transmitted by the fecal-oral route, which means you must get something in your mouth that is contaminated with feces from an infected person. Some viruses, such as West Nile, can infect people through insects like mosquitoes. Viral meningitis can also be a complication of common viral infections like chickenpox or certain diarrheal illnesses.

How is it treated?

Since antibiotics are not effective against viruses, there is no specific therapy for viral meningitis. Sometimes your doctor may start antibiotics while waiting for the spinal fluid culture results to rule out bacterial causes. Because viral meningitis is rarely serious, it can often be managed on an outpatient basis.

How is it prevented?

- Practice good hygiene and always wash your hands after going to the toilet and before preparing food.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.
- Avoid sharing eating utensils or other objects like pop bottles and drinking glasses.
- Have your children immunized against measles, mumps, rubella, and polio. These diseases can cause meningitis.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or 2573612.

Visit our website at: www.gchd.us or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

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