

VIRAL MENINGITIS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Viral Meningitis?

Meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord and is usually caused by a bacteria or virus. Viral or “aseptic” meningitis, which is the most common type, is caused by an infection with one of several types of viruses. Viral meningitis can be serious but is rarely fatal in persons with normal immune systems.

How is it spread?

Viral meningitis can be caused by a number of different viruses, many of which are transmitted through direct contact with the respiratory secretions such as saliva, sputum or nasal secretions of an infected person. The virus can be found in the stool of an infected person and spread through fecal-oral contamination. Sometimes viral meningitis arises as a complication of other viral illnesses such as chickenpox, mumps or certain diarrheal illnesses. The incubation period depends on the specific viral agent. Active disease seldom exceeds 10 days.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for viral meningitis. Doctors will often recommend bedrest, plenty of fluids, and medication to relieve fever and headache. Sometimes a physician may prescribe a course of antibiotics until a bacterial cause has been ruled out. Viral meningitis is usually managed on an outpatient basis. A hospital stay may be necessary for more severe cases or for people with weakened immune systems.

How can we prevent Viral Meningitis?

- Practice good hygiene and always wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before preparing food.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.
- Avoid sharing eating utensils, pop or water bottles, and drinking glasses.
- Keep immunizations against viral vaccine preventable diseases up-to-date (measles, mumps, rubella, polio, chickenpox).

SYMPTOMS OF VIRAL MENINGITIS

- Severe headache
- Stiff neck and back
- Vomiting
- Sudden fever
- Irritability
- Discomfort looking into bright lights
- Rash

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