

Meningitis



What is it?

Meningitis is swelling of the protective covering of the brain and spinal cord. Viral meningitis is the most common type. Meningitis can also be caused by bacteria. Bacterial meningitis is usually more severe and can be fatal.

How does viral meningitis spread?

Several viruses can cause viral meningitis and they spread in different ways.

- Enteroviruses are the most common cause.
- They usually spread through contact with an infected person's mucus, saliva or stool.

Symptoms

A person may have symptoms 3-7 days after being exposed to a virus.

Symptoms in children and adults:

- Fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to light
- Sleepiness or irritability
- Nausea or vomiting

Symptoms in babies:

- Fever
- Irritability
- Poor eating
- Sleepiness or difficulty waking
- Lack of energy

People who may have meningitis should see a health care provider right away.



Who is at risk for severe illness?

Children younger than 5 years old and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of getting the disease. Some people are more likely to have severe illness, including:

- Babies younger than 1 month old
- People with weakened immune systems

Ways to prevent viral meningitis

- Wash hands often, especially after using the toilet or changing diapers
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home when sick
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces with a diluted bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water)
- Stay up to date on vaccines for diseases that can cause viral meningitis

When sick

Viral meningitis is usually a mild illness, and most people recover completely in 7 - 10 days.

- Rest
- Drink fluids
- Manage fever
- Stay home
- There is usually no specific treatment, and antibiotics are not effective



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