



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Viral Meningitis

What is viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis (sometimes called aseptic meningitis), is an inflammation of the lining surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Viral meningitis can be caused by a number of viruses and is usually less severe than bacterial meningitis. While viral meningitis can occur at any time of the year, it most often occurs in late summer or early fall. Viral meningitis is not a reportable disease in Indiana, so it is not known how many cases occur each year.

What are the symptoms of viral meningitis?

Symptoms of viral meningitis may include:

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to light
- Nausea or vomiting
- Drowsiness, lack of energy (lethargy), or trouble waking from sleep
- Confusion

In babies, the symptoms are more difficult to identify but may include:

- Fever
- Poor appetite
- Fretfulness or irritability
- Difficulty waking

How is viral meningitis spread?

Since viral meningitis can be caused by a number of viruses, it can be spread many ways. Some of the most common ways that viral meningitis can be spread include:

- Coughing or sneezing in someone's face

- Not washing hands after using the toilet
- Sharing eating or drinking utensils with an infected person
- Kissing an infected person

If you come in contact with someone who has viral meningitis, you have a small chance of developing symptoms. Many people who are exposed do not become ill, and most people infected with these viruses develop only mild illness, such as a head cold or rash. Rarely, serious infection can develop.

Who is at risk for getting viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is more common in children, but anyone can get viral meningitis.

How do I know if I have viral meningitis?

In the early stages of meningitis, the symptoms of viral and bacterial meningitis may be the same. Therefore, it is very important for anyone with these symptoms to consult a healthcare provider right away. Viral meningitis can be serious but rarely fatal. Symptoms usually last 7-10 days, and most people make a full recovery.

How is viral meningitis treated?

Healthcare providers often suggest bed rest, plenty of fluids, and medications to help relieve some of the symptoms.

How is viral meningitis prevented?

The risk of getting viral meningitis can be reduced by good hygiene. It is important to clean your hands often, especially after:

- Coughing or sneezing
- Before and after caring for a sick person
- After using the toilet or changing diapers

There are vaccines to prevent infections from some of the viruses that can cause viral meningitis, so it is important to keep children's immunizations current. Contact your healthcare provider if you have questions about vaccines.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/viral.html>

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