

Viral Meningitis



What is viral meningitis?

Meningitis is an illness in which there is inflammation of the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord. Viral or aseptic meningitis, which is the most common type, is caused by an infection with one of several types of viruses. Meningitis can also be caused by infection with certain bacteria and fungi.

How is viral meningitis spread?

The viruses which most often cause meningitis (enteroviruses) are spread through direct contact with the respiratory secretions of an infected person. This usually happens by shaking hands with an infected person or touching something they have handled, and then rubbing one's own nose, mouth or eyes. These viruses can also be found in the stool of persons who are infected and can be spread to anyone who helps with toileting or handles the diapers of an infected person.

What are the symptoms of viral meningitis?

The most common symptoms are fever, headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to bright lights, drowsiness or confusion, nausea and vomiting. In babies, the symptoms may include fever, fretfulness or irritability, difficulty awakening, and refusing to eat.

→ *It is important that people suspected of having meningitis seek medical evaluation. The symptoms of viral meningitis are similar to those of bacterial meningitis, which is usually more severe and can be fatal.*

How soon after infection do symptoms of viral meningitis appear?

Viral meningitis symptoms usually begin between three to seven days after becoming infected with an enterovirus. These symptoms usually last from seven to ten days and the patient recovers completely. It should be noted that only a small percentage of people who become infected with an enterovirus will develop viral meningitis.

When and for how long is a person able to spread viral meningitis?

A person infected with viral meningitis is contagious for about one week after symptoms develop.

Does the infection of viral meningitis make a person immune?

Because viral meningitis can be caused by a variety of viruses

there is no long-term immunity if someone has had viral meningitis in the past.

What are the complications associated with viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is an illness that usually goes away on its own without treatment or complications.

Are there vaccines for viral meningitis?

There are no vaccines for the prevention of viral meningitis. There are vaccines to protect against bacterial meningitis.

What can be done to avoid getting viral meningitis?

Washing hands thoroughly and often. In institutional settings, such as childcare centers, washing objects and surfaces with a diluted bleach solution (one-part bleach to ten-parts water, made daily) can be very effective in inactivating viruses.

For more information:

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