



# Fact Sheet: Viral Meningitis

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## What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid of a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. It is caused by a viral or bacterial infection.

## What is viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is the most common and less severe form of meningitis that is also known as aseptic meningitis. It resolves without any particular treatment within 7 to 10 days. Many different viruses can cause meningitis mostly during the summer and fall months.

## What are the symptoms of viral meningitis?

Symptoms usually begin within three or four days after exposure to the germ. However, onset may vary from as early as two days to as late as 10 days. Usually, people either do not get sick at all from the germs that cause meningitis or they have mild flulike symptoms. In more serious cases, symptoms include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Irritability
- Poor eating
- Lethargy (lack of energy)
- Discomfort looking into bright light
- Confusion
- Sleepiness

In newborns and young babies, these symptoms may be hard to detect. The baby may appear slow or inactive, be irritable, have vomiting, or eat poorly.

## Can viral meningitis be spread from person to person?

Viruses that cause meningitis can be spread via respiratory secretions or from stool of an infected person. Contact with an individual with viral meningitis may increase one's chances of becoming infected with the virus that made them sick, but those infected will have a small chance of developing meningitis as a complication due to their illness.

## Should a child be kept home from school who has been diagnosed with viral meningitis?

There are no specific exclusions from school for viral meningitis, but hospitalization is common if the infection does not get better in a few days or if the child begins to feel worse.

## Who gets viral meningitis?

People of any age can get meningitis. It is more common among:

- Children younger than 5 years of age
- Young adults
- Elderly

People with certain blood clotting disorders and those who have lost their spleen are also more likely to get meningitis.

## How is it prevented?

Since most people who are infected do not become sick, it can be hard to prevent the spread of the germ. However, good personal hygiene and hand washing lowers a person's chance of getting infected.

## Is there a vaccine for viral meningitis?

No. There are only vaccines for certain types of bacterial meningitis.

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