

Get the Facts: Viral Meningitis

What is Viral meningitis?

Meningitis is an infectious disease leading to inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. Viral meningitis is the most common form of meningitis.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Viral meningitis is typically less severe than bacterial meningitis, and most people recover without treatment. Symptoms of viral meningitis in babies include fever, irritability, poor eating, sleepiness or trouble waking up from sleep, and lack of energy. Common symptoms in adults include: fever, headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to bright light, sleepiness or trouble waking up from sleep, nausea, vomiting, lack of appetite, and lack of energy.

How long does this disease last?

The disease typically lasts less than four days but can range from one to ten days.

How is Viral meningitis spread?

Viral meningitis is spread through close contact with respiratory secretions from an infected individual. Shedding from the respiratory tract can last about one week, while shedding from the stool continues for numerous weeks.

Who is at risk for viral meningitis infection?

Viral meningitis can occur at any age, children younger than 5 years old, and individuals with weakened immune systems have higher risk of getting the disease.

What preventive measures and treatments are available?

Viral meningitis is not a vaccine-preventable disease. It is best prevented by maintaining appropriate hygiene including:

- Frequent hand washing, especially after changing diapers, using the toilet, or blowing one's nose,
- Avoiding touching one's face with unclean hands,
- Avoiding close contact such as kissing, hugging,
- Not sharing cups or eating utensils with people who are sick,
- Thorough cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs, and
- Staying home when sick.

Viral meningitis has no specific treatment. However, most people recover completely on their own within 7 to 10 days. Depending on which virus has caused disease, some individuals may need antiviral treatment to get better. For this reason, it is important that individuals who develop symptoms of meningitis infection consult their health care provider right away.

What should schools do?

- Notify exposed family and staff to watch for symptoms,
- Teach and encourage appropriate hand hygiene amongst students and staff,
- Recommend that anyone with symptoms of meningitis sees a healthcare provider as soon as possible since some forms of meningitis can be very severe.

What are recommendations for exclusion?

Individuals should be excluded as soon as meningitis is suspected. They should be cleared by their health care provider for return to school.

For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/viral.html>.

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