

# Viral Meningitis

## What is viral meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. Many different viruses can cause viral meningitis. Viral meningitis is also known as aseptic meningitis.

## How is it spread?

Viral meningitis is caused by several different viruses, many of which are transmitted through the respiratory route by coughing or sneezing. The virus can also be shed in the feces of an infected person and spread through the fecal-oral route. Viral meningitis can also arise as a complication of many common viral disorders like chickenpox or certain diarrheal illnesses.

## What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to light
- Sleepiness or trouble waking up
- Nausea
- Irritability
- Vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Lack of energy

## How is it prevented?

- Practice good hand washing, particularly after using the bathroom or changing a diaper.
- Avoid close contact (kissing, shaking hands, etc.) with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Avoid mosquito bites.
- Be sure that you are fully vaccinated against vaccine preventable diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella, polio, and chickenpox, many of which can cause meningitis.

## How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for viral meningitis. Treatment usually focuses on treating the symptoms of the illness. Antiviral medication can sometimes be helpful. Most people with viral meningitis recover completely in 7-10 days.

*This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*