

# Fact Sheet: Viral Meningitis

## What is Viral Meningitis?

Viral meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord that is caused by a virus, usually enteroviruses. Still, there are many viral infections that can lead to viral meningitis, including measles, mumps, herpes viruses, varicella-zoster virus, and influenza viruses. In general, viral meningitis is less severe than bacterial or fungal meningitis, is less common, and usually resolves itself. However, in some cases, hospitalization is required during recovery.

## Signs and Symptoms

The following symptoms are common in infants:

- Fever
- Irritability
- Poor eating
- Hard to awaken
- Lethargy

The following symptoms are common in older children and adults:

- High fever
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to bright light
- Sleepiness or trouble waking up
- Nausea
- vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Lethargy

Symptoms can appear quickly after exposure or can take several days to appear, usually after a cold, diarrhea, vomiting, or other signs of infection show up. Symptoms last between 7 and 10 days, and most people recover completely.

## How is it spread?

Viral meningitis can be caused by many different viruses, many of which are passed to others through coughing and sneezing. Some viruses are transmitted by the fecal-oral route, which means you put something in your mouth that is contaminated with feces from an infected person. Viral meningitis can also be a complication of common viral infections like chickenpox, mumps, measles, influenza, West Nile or some diarrheal illnesses.

## Treatment

Since antibiotics are not effective against viruses, there is no specific therapy for viral meningitis. Because viral meningitis is rarely serious, it can often be managed on an outpatient basis. Your doctor may recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids and over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications relieve the fever and headache.

## Prevention

- Wash your hands frequently after going to the bathroom, changing a diaper, coughing, sneezing and before preparing food.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you sneeze or cough. Cough or sneeze in your sleeve if tissues are not available.
- Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, chapstick etc. with people who are sick or when you are sick.
- **Have your children immunized against Measles, mumps, rubella, varicella, and polio. These diseases can cause meningitis.**

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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