



1. What is viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is serious but rarely fatal infection of the fluid in the spinal cord and surrounding the brain. Viral meningitis can be caused by many different viruses. Viral meningitis usually does not result in permanent damage to the brain and spinal cord.

2. How do you get viral meningitis?

You can get viral meningitis:

- Through contact with the infected person's saliva, nasal mucus or feces. This usually occurs when you:
 - ◆ shake hands with the infected person and then touch your own eyes, nose or mouth
 - ◆ come into contact with feces, especially among small children who are not toilet trained and adults who change diapers of an infected infant

Viral meningitis occurs across all age groups, but most frequently occurs in children. You can usually spread the virus to someone beginning about 3 days after you are infected until about 10 days after you develop symptoms.

3. How do you know if you have viral meningitis?

The most common signs and symptoms for meningitis include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Stiff Neck
- Crankiness
- Confusion
- Sleepiness or difficult to wake
- Neck stiffness

The symptoms can last from seven to ten days, but most people will recover completely.

In newborns and small infants, the classic symptoms of fever, headache, and neck stiffness may be absent or difficult to detect.

Your doctor will do a spinal tap (a needle is inserted into an area in the lower back where fluid in the spinal canal is accessible) to determine if you have meningitis.

4. How is viral meningitis treated?

There is no specific treatment for most types of viral meningitis. Most people get better on their own. Viral meningitis does not respond to antibiotics. Your doctor may suggest bed rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and medicine to relieve the fever and headache.

5. How can viral meningitis be prevented?

- Wash your hands often with soap and clean water.
- Do not share eating utensils, cigarettes, lipstick, food, drinks, and any other items that may be contaminated by saliva.
- Avoid mosquito bites– use bug repellent.
- Have your children immunized against measles, mumps, rubella, varicella, and polio. These viral diseases can cause meningitis.
- Clean contaminated surfaces and soiled articles with soap and water first, and then with a dilute solution of chlorine-containing bleach to disinfect them.

6. What other information do I need to know about viral meningitis?

- If you think your child or a member of your family has viral meningitis, see your medical provider as soon as possible.
- It is important that all cases are checked for bacterial meningitis which is life-threatening and requires antibiotic treatment.

Sources

1. *Viral Meningitis*. L.A. County, Department of Public Health. <http://www.lapublichealth.org/acd/>
2. *Viral Meningitis*. California Department of Public Health. <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/MeningococcalDisease.aspx>
3. *Viral Meningitis*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/viral/>
4. *Viral Meningitis*. Department of Health Promotion and Education. <http://www.dhpe.org/infect/vmenin.html>
5. *Viral Meningitis*. Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center Medical College. <http://www.hmc.psu.edu/healthinfo/uz/viralmeningitis.htm>

For additional resources, please visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.