

Facts & DETAILS

Viral Meningitis

Page 1

What is viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord caused by a virus.

How common is viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is the most common type of meningitis in the United States. Non-polio enteroviruses are the most common cause of viral meningitis in the United States.

How do people become infected?

People who are around someone with viral meningitis may become infected with the virus, but are not likely to develop meningitis. Enteroviruses are most often spread person-to-person through fecal (poop) contamination. Viral meningitis can also be spread through saliva, sputum, or mucus. Other viral infections that may cause meningitis include mumps, herpesvirus, measles, influenza, and the virus that causes chickenpox and shingles (varicella-zoster virus). Viruses spread through mosquitoes and other insects can also lead to viral meningitis.

What are the signs and symptoms of viral meningitis?

Symptoms in adults are different from symptoms in infants and young children.

Adults and older children may experience high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to bright light, sleepiness or trouble waking up, nausea, vomiting, or lack of appetite.

Infants and young children may experience fever, irritability, poor eating habits, and trouble waking up.

How long can a person spread viral meningitis?

After exposure, symptoms can appear quickly or they can take several days to appear. For enteroviruses, symptoms appear in three to seven days. Symptoms typically last seven to 10 days, and an infected person may spread the virus while symptoms are present.

Who is at risk for viral meningitis?

Anyone can get viral meningitis, but children less than five years old and people with weakened immune systems are at a higher risk. Babies less than one month old and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to have severe disease.

How is viral meningitis treated?

Viral meningitis is caused by a virus, so antibiotics won't work. There is no specific treatment for viral meningitis, and most people recover without treatment. Recommendations to relieve symptoms include bed rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and medicine to relieve fever and headache.

How can you prevent viral meningitis?

There are no vaccines to prevent against non-polio enteroviruses, the most common cause of viral meningitis. You can help prevent infection by taking these simple steps:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often, especially after changing diapers, using the toilet, coughing/sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Do not kiss sick people; do not kiss others while sick.
- Do not share glasses, eating utensils, or similar items.
- Get vaccinated against measles and mumps (MMR vaccine) and chickenpox (varicella-zoster vaccine). This can protect children against some diseases that can lead to viral meningitis.
- Avoid mosquito and other insect bites that carry disease.
- If you have a rodent problem in and/or around your home, follow the cleaning and control precautions listed on the CDC's website (www.cdc.gov) about lymphocytic choriomeningitis (LCMV).

For More Information:
Sedgwick County Division of Health
Epidemiology Program
1900 E. 9th St.
Wichita, KS 67214
(316) 660-7300
www.sedgwickcounty.org



Sedgwick County...
working for you

Sedgwick County Corporate Communications Office

316-660-9370 525 N. Main Suite 315 Wichita KS 67203 www.sedgwickcounty.org