

Viral Meningitis

What is viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is an illness caused by a number of viruses that affect the thin lining (called meninges) and fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord. The viruses cause the tissues to swell. Most people who get viral meningitis will have mild symptoms and usually fully recover in about a week without medical attention.

How do I get viral meningitis?

There are many different viruses that can cause viral meningitis. Most of these viruses are spread through infected persons saliva, nasal secretions, or feces. It can also be contracted through a mosquito bite. You can get viral meningitis by breathing in droplets of an infected person's cough or sneeze and through kissing. You can also get sick by putting something in your mouth that was handled by an infected person who did not wash their hands well after using the restroom or by someone who did not wash their hands well after changing the diaper of an infected infant.

Symptoms

Symptoms vary slightly depending on the virus involved. Some of the most common symptoms include:

- Fever
- Stiff neck
- Nausea and vomiting
- Severe headache
- Drowsiness or confusion
- Rash (sometimes)

How long is an infected person contagious (able to spread the disease)?

An infected person can spread the virus for one to two weeks. Some infected people may not have noticeable symptoms and still be able to spread the virus without ever knowing they are sick.

Prevention

- Wash hands often, especially after using the restroom, after sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose and before handling food.
- Always cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
- Sanitize baby toys and other objects young children might put in their mouths with one tablespoon bleach in one gallon of water. Let objects soak for two minutes, rinse and air dry.

Treatment of viral meningitis

There is no treatment for viral meningitis at this time. Most people will fully recover in about a week. However, if symptoms are severe, it is important to see your health care provider. Antibiotics are not effective against viral meningitis, but your health care provider can provide supportive care such as pain medication and fluid therapy.



**Tri-County Health
Department**

Eleven offices serving the residents of Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties
Administration Office: 7000 East Belleview Avenue, Suite 301 • Greenwood Village, Colorado 80111
Telephone: 303-220-9200 • Fax: 303-220-9208 • Website: www.tchd.org