

# VIRAL MENINGITIS

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

### ***What is Viral Meningitis?***

*Meningitis is an infection of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by bacteria or viruses, but viral meningitis is more common, rarely serious, and usually causes less long lasting problems than the bacterial form. Many different viruses can cause viral meningitis and it is sometimes referred to as aseptic meningitis because no bacteria are found in the spinal fluid.*

### **How is it spread?**

Viral meningitis is caused by a large number of different viruses, many of which are transmitted through the respiratory route like coughing and sneezing or shed in the stool and spread through fecal-oral contamination.

Viral meningitis can also arise as a complication of many common viral disorders like chickenpox or certain diarrheal illnesses or can be transmitted by some insects like mosquitoes. Although active disease seldom exceeds 10 days, the incubation period depends on the specific viral agent.

### **How is it treated?**

Since antibiotics are not effective against viruses, there is no specific therapy for viral meningitis. To rule out bacterial causes, your doctor may wish to start antibiotics pending spinal fluid culture results. Because viral meningitis is rarely serious, it will usually be managed on an outpatient basis.

### **How can we prevent Viral Meningitis?**

- Practice good hygiene and always wash your hands after going to the toilet and before preparing food.
- If you sneeze or cough, cover your mouth and nose.
- Avoid sharing eating utensils or other objects like pop bottles or drinking glasses.
- Be sure to have your child appropriately immunized against the vaccine-preventable diseases (measles, mumps, rubella, polio), many of which can cause meningitis.

### **SYMPTOMS OF VIRAL MENINGITIS**

- Severe headache
- Stiff neck and back
- Vomiting
- Sudden fever
- Irritability
- Sometimes a rash
- Discomfort looking into bright lights



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