



# Viral Meningitis

## What is it?

Viral meningitis is a disease that causes the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord to be inflamed. It is caused by an infection with one of several types of viruses.

## Is it a serious disease?

- Yes, viral meningitis is a serious disease, but it is rarely fatal.
- Most people recover fully, with symptoms lasting seven to 10 days.
- Many different viruses can cause viral meningitis.
- About 90% of cases are caused by a group of viruses known as enterovirus, such as coxsackievirus and echovirus.

## How does it spread?

- Enteroviruses, the most common cause of viral meningitis, are often spread through direct contact with saliva, sputum or nasal mucus of an infected person.
- The spread usually happens by shaking hands with an infected person or touching something he or she has touched, and then rubbing one's own nose, mouth or eyes.
- The virus can also be in the stool of an infected person. The virus spreads through this route mainly among small children who are not yet toilet trained.
- Adults can also spread the virus by changing an infected baby's diaper.
- It usually takes between three to seven

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may not be the same for every person.

The more common symptoms include:

- Fever.
- Severe headache.
- Stiff neck.
- Bright lights hurting the eyes.
- Drowsiness or confusion.
- Nausea and vomiting.

For babies the more common symptoms are:

- Fever.
- Fretfulness or irritability.
- May be hard to wake the baby.
- Baby may refuse to eat.

days from the time someone is infected until symptoms develop.

- People can usually spread the virus to someone else beginning about three days after they are infected until about 10 days after they develop symptoms.

## How is it treated?

- There is no specific treatment for viral meningitis.
- Most patients recover fully on their own.
- Doctors will often recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids and medicine to relieve fever and headache.

## How can you reduce the chances of being infected?

- The most effective way of preventing the spread of the virus is to wash your hands

thoroughly and often before and after handling food, after using the washroom, and after sneezing or wiping your nose.

- Wash objects and surfaces with a diluted bleach solution (mix one capful of chlorine-containing household bleach with one gallon of water).

## What is the difference between viral meningitis and bacterial meningitis?

- Viral meningitis is caused by a viral infection (virus) and is rarely fatal.
- Bacterial meningitis is caused by bacteria and can be very serious and result in disability or death if not treated promptly.
- The symptoms for viral and bacterial meningitis are often the same.
- If you think you or your child has meningitis, see your doctor right away.