

Viral meningitis



Viral meningitis is an infection of the membrane covering the spinal cord and brain (the meninges) caused by a variety of viruses, most commonly those associated with gastroenteritis (also known as 'gastro')

How viral meningitis is spread

The viruses that can cause meningitis in humans may be spread in a variety of ways including respiratory secretions or faeces.

Signs and symptoms

Viral meningitis is more common in children than adults but can occur in any age group. It is rarely serious, but symptoms may be severe.

Recovery is usually complete.

Symptoms include:

- > headache
- > fever
- > nausea or vomiting
- > neck stiffness
- > drowsiness (excessive sleepiness), irritability or confusion
- > photophobia (discomfort on looking at bright lights)
- > muscle or joint pain
- > seizures (fits).

Diagnosis

In some cases of viral meningitis, the virus can be identified either by blood tests or by growing the virus from a throat specimen, faeces sample or CSF (cerebrospinal fluid: the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord). An exact cause is identified in less than half of cases.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Varies according to the specific infectious virus.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Varies according to the specific infectious virus.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for most cases of viral meningitis. Some patients will need to go to hospital for specialised care and observation.

It is important to drink plenty of fluids. Paracetamol may be used for pain and fever. Aspirin should not be given to children under 12 years of age unless specifically recommended by a doctor.

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Prevention

- > exclude people with viral meningitis from childcare, preschool, school and work until well
- > follow good hand washing procedures and personal hygiene at all times.

Useful links

SA Health website: You've Got What
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/YouveGotWhat

- > Exclusion from childcare, preschool, school and work
- > Hand hygiene

You've Got What? Viral Meningitis

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The SA Health Disclaimer for this resource is located at
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat

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SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group



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