



Viral Meningitis

What is viral meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the covering of the brain and spinal cord. Meningitis is usually caused by bacteria or viruses. Viral infection of the meninges is referred to as viral meningitis. It is the most common type of meningitis known and is usually mild. Many different viruses can cause viral meningitis. Viral meningitis is most commonly caused by enteroviruses. It should not be confused with bacterial meningitis which is less common but more serious. Most people are exposed to viral meningitis at some point in their lives, but few actually develop meningitis.

What are the symptoms of viral meningitis?

Most infected persons have no symptoms or may develop only a cold or rash with a mild fever. Other symptoms may include:

- high fever
- headache
- stiff neck
- nausea
- vomiting
- photophobia (a sensitivity to light)
- confusion
- sleepiness.

Symptoms may develop suddenly, in hours or over one to two days, and may last up to seven to 10 days. In younger children, symptoms may be difficult to notice. Infants may appear lethargic, irritable or feed poorly.

Immediate medical attention is necessary if any of these symptoms are present. Early diagnosis and treatment is very important. Tests may be required so that the doctor can examine the fluid for bacteria around the brain and spinal cord.

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca

How does viral meningitis spread?

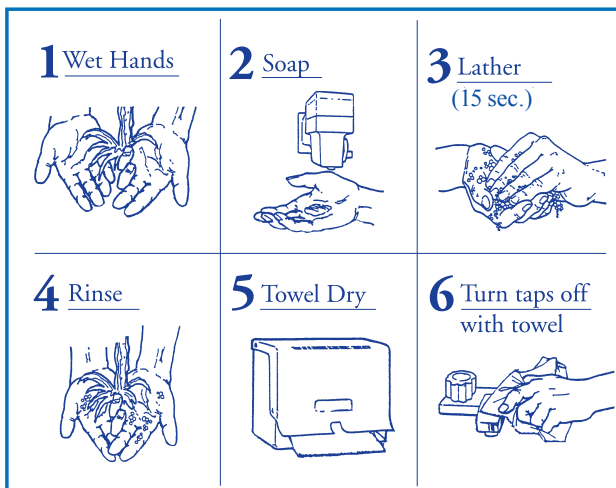
Some viruses that cause viral meningitis are spread through direct contact with respiratory secretions such as saliva, sputum or nasal secretions. This usually happens by shaking hands with an infected person or touching something they have handled, and then rubbing your nose, mouth or eyes.

Some viruses may also be found in the stool of persons who are infected. The virus is spread through fecal contamination (such as by someone who uses the toilet or changes a baby's diaper and does not wash their hands well afterward.)

Viral meningitis is more common during the summer and early fall. Usually, less than one of every 1,000 persons infected with the virus actually develop meningitis.

How can viral meningitis be prevented?

- The most effective method of prevention is to wash your hands thoroughly and often for at least 15 seconds using the 6-step method.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys, or anything that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions.
- There is no immunization to prevent viral meningitis, but routine immunization against other diseases is important in preventing some of the diseases that can cause viral meningitis.
- If you are ill, stay at home.



How is viral meningitis treated?

Some types of viral meningitis can be treated with antiviral medication however, there is no specific treatment is available for most types of viral meningitis. Supportive measures may include bed rest, drinking plenty of fluids and over-the-counter medication to treat a fever or headache. Most people with viral meningitis recover completely on their own without complications within a few days to a week.

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