

VIRAL MENINGITIS FACT SHEET

What is viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is an infection of the meninges (the covering of the brain and spinal cord) that is caused by a virus. Enteroviruses, the most common cause of viral meningitis, appear most often during the summer and fall in climates with changing seasons.

What are the symptoms of viral meningitis?

Meningitis infection is characterized by a sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck. It is often accompanied by other symptoms, such as

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Photophobia (sensitivity to light)
- Altered mental status

Who can get viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis can affect anyone at any age.

How does viral meningitis spread?

Enteroviruses, the most common cause of viral meningitis, are most often spread from person to person through fecal contamination (which can occur when changing a diaper or using the toilet and not properly washing hands afterwards). Enteroviruses can also be spread through respiratory secretions (saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) of an infected person.

Is there treatment for viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis is often less severe than bacterial meningitis and usually resolves without specific treatment, but in some cases viral meningitis can be severe or fatal. The symptoms of viral meningitis are similar to those for bacterial meningitis, which can be fatal. Because of this, it is important to see a healthcare provider right away if you think you or your child might have meningitis.

How can you prevent the spread of viral meningitis?

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often, especially after changing diapers, using the toilet, or coughing or blowing your nose.
- Cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily, and when soiled.
- Avoid kissing or sharing cups or eating utensils with sick people; avoid sharing with others when you are sick.
- Make sure you and your child are vaccinated on schedule. Vaccinations included in the childhood vaccination schedule can protect children against some diseases that can lead to viral meningitis. These include vaccines against measles and mumps (MMR vaccine) and chickenpox (varicella-zoster vaccine).

For additional information contact Contra Costa Public Health at (925) 313-6740 or check our website at <http://cchealth.org/cd/> or <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/viral.html>