

What is viral meningitis?

Meningitis is swelling of the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. Viral meningitis is relatively common. Many different viruses can cause viral meningitis. Coxsackievirus and echovirus, both members of the enterovirus group, are responsible for the majority of identified viral meningitis cases in the United States. Adenovirus, mumps, measles, herpes simplex, and varicella (chickenpox) can also cause meningitis.

What are the symptoms of viral meningitis?

Illness is generally characterized by fever, stiff neck, headache, nausea and vomiting, and sometimes a rash. Other gastrointestinal and respiratory symptoms have been reported by those infected with enteroviruses. Illness typically resolves within 10 days and most individuals have a complete recovery.

How soon do symptoms appear?

For most enteroviruses symptoms appear in 3 to 6 days.

How is viral meningitis spread?

Most viruses that cause meningitis are transmitted primarily from person-to-person. Person-to-person transmission modes vary, depending on the particular virus. They may be transmitted from: hand to mouth (enteroviruses), airborne transmission (measles, varicella), respiratory droplet transmission (enteroviruses, mumps), and direct contact (mumps, measles, herpes simplex, chickenpox).

Who gets viral meningitis?

Anyone can get viral meningitis.

For how long is a person infectious?

Enteroviruses may be shed in feces for several days to many weeks after symptoms have resolved. Enteroviruses may also be shed in respiratory secretions, usually for no longer than 1 week following symptoms.

What is the treatment for this illness?

No specific treatment for viral meningitis exists at this time. Most patients completely recover without treatment. Doctors often will recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids, and medication to relieve fever and headache.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?

Infected persons can return to school, work, or child care as soon as they feel well enough. For those viruses that are transmitted from hand to mouth or by respiratory droplet such as mumps or measles, infected people may be excluded from school or child care depending on the specific virus causing the disease.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of these viruses?

Since most forms of viral meningitis are caused by enteroviruses, which are shed in a persons stool, individuals should be advised to practice good hygiene, especially frequent and thorough handwashing.