



Viral Meningitis Tip Sheet

Background

Meningitis is an inflammation (swelling) of the protective membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. Different types of bacterial or viral infections of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord can cause meningitis. It is important to know the specific cause of meningitis because the treatment differs depending on the cause. Meningitis caused by viruses is serious but often is less severe than bacterial meningitis. People with healthy immune systems who get viral meningitis usually recover on their own. There are vaccines to prevent some types of viral meningitis. Babies younger than 1 month old and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to have severe illness from viral meningitis.

Common causes of viral meningitis are:

- Non-polio enteroviruses
- Mumps virus
- Herpesviruses
- Epstein-Barr virus
- Varicella Zoster virus
- Measles virus
- Influenza virus
- Lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus

Clinical Description

Initial symptoms of viral meningitis are similar to those for [bacterial meningitis](#).

Common symptoms in babies

- Fever
- Irritability
- Poor eating
- Sleepiness or trouble waking up from sleep
- Lethargy (a lack of energy)

Common symptoms in children and adults

- Fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Photophobia (eyes being more sensitive to light)
- Sleepiness or trouble waking up from sleep
- Nausea
- Irritability
- Vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Lethargy (a lack of energy)

Most people with mild viral meningitis usually recover within 7 to 10 days.

Transmission

Close contacts of someone with viral meningitis can become infected with the virus that made that person sick. However, these close contacts are not likely to develop meningitis. Only a small number of people who get infected with the viruses that can cause meningitis will develop viral meningitis.

Investigating a Case

Cases with an infectious virus identified in a sterile site, such as the cerebral spinal fluid or blood, should be reported on their specific reportable disease condition form. However, if the case is infected with a virus, fungus, ameba, and/or parasite, in which there is not an existing specific MDSS form, Meningitis Aseptic can be used. See the table below for additional guidance:

Infectious Agent Identified in sterile site (e.g., CSF or blood)*	Reportable Condition
Enterovirus	Meningitis - Aseptic
Mumps	Mumps
Herpesviruses	Meningitis – Aseptic
Epstein-Barr virus	Meningitis – Aseptic
Varicella zoster virus	Varicella Zoster Unspecified or Chickenpox
Measles virus	Measles
Influenza virus	Influenza
Lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus	Meningitis – Aseptic
Human Parechovirus	Meningitis – Aseptic
No identified virus, but clinician diagnosed aseptic meningitis	Meningitis – Aseptic

*Meningitis-Aseptic can be used as a catch-all for fungal, amebic and/or parasitic agents, but only if the infectious agent does not have an existing MDSS form to be reported under.

Additional Resources

- [CDC Viral Meningitis Page](#)
- [Meningitis, Aseptic Case Definition](#)