



Viral Meningitis

Your child may have been exposed to this disease

If your child has symptoms, please contact your child's healthcare provider.

If my child has this disease, when can he or she return to school or child care?

A child with viral meningitis may NOT return to school or child care UNTIL he or she no longer has symptoms and is cleared by their doctor.

Viral meningitis is an infection of the tissue that covers the brain and spinal cord. It is most often caused by viruses like the type that causes hand-foot-and-mouth disease, chickenpox, mumps, viruses spread by mosquitos, and others. However, only a small number of people who get these illnesses will develop meningitis.

Symptoms are:

- Fever
- Irritability
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to bright light
- Sleepiness, trouble waking from sleep, or low energy
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Loss of appetite

Symptoms usually start 3 to 7 days after a person is exposed to the virus, but it can be different for each person.

What can I do now?

Watch your child for symptoms of this disease. **It is very important to call a doctor or healthcare provider right away if you think you or your child might have meningitis.** At first, viral meningitis has the same symptoms as meningitis caused by bacteria, but bacterial meningitis worsens and can cause severe illness and death. Only a doctor can determine if you or your child has this disease, if it is caused by a virus or bacteria, and the best treatment. Most people with viral meningitis usually get better within 7 to 10 days.

If your child gets sick, prevent others from getting ill by:

- Keep your child at home until your child no longer has symptoms.
- Wash hands carefully.
- Cover your cough with a tissue or cough into your upper arm, and put used tissues in the trash.

This can be a serious disease for babies, children younger than 5 years old, and people with immune system problems.

How is viral meningitis spread?

If you have close contact with a sick person you may become infected with the virus that caused the meningitis, but you are not likely to develop meningitis. Only a small number of people who are infected with viruses will actually develop meningitis.

Viruses that cause meningitis are spread in different ways, such as:

- Coughing and sneezing
- Kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils with people who are sick
- Touching the stool of someone who is sick
- A bite from a mosquito carrying a virus
- Touching a surface or object with the virus on it.