

Viral Meningitis

An infection of the covering of the spinal cord and brain caused by a variety of viruses, most commonly those associated with gastroenteritis (inflammation of the stomach and intestines). Viral meningitis is relatively common, but rarely serious, though symptoms may be severe. Recovery is usually complete.

Symptoms include:

- > headache
- > fever
- > vomiting
- > neck stiffness and joint pains
- > drowsiness or confusion
- > photophobia (discomfort on looking at bright lights).

In some cases of viral meningitis, the virus can be identified, by either blood tests or by growing the virus from specimens obtained from the throat, faeces or occasionally by lumbar puncture (removing a sample of fluid from around the spinal cord). An exact cause is identified in less than half of cases.

The viruses that can cause meningitis in humans may be spread from a variety of means including respiratory secretions or faeces.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Varies according to the specific infectious virus.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Varies according to the specific infectious virus.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for most cases of viral meningitis. Some cases will need to go to hospital for specialised care and observation. It is important to drink plenty of fluids.

Paracetamol may be used for pain and fever.

! Aspirin should not be given to children under 12 years of age unless specifically recommended by a doctor.

Control of spread

- > Follow good hand washing procedures and personal hygiene at all times.

- > Hand Hygiene