

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an inflammation of the lining around the brain and spinal cord. Viruses account for most cases of meningitis and are an important cause of admission to hospital. Symptoms of viral meningitis include headache, dislike of bright lights, neck stiffness, fever and nausea/vomiting. Individuals may also develop a rash or have muscle pain. People affected normally recover without medical treatment.

What causes viral meningitis?

Many different viruses can cause meningitis. Most people are exposed to some of them during their life without developing meningitis.

How is viral meningitis treated?

There are no effective therapies for most viruses that cause meningitis (antibiotics are ineffective against viruses), so treatment is normally limited to easing the symptoms of the disease (for example painkillers for headache or anti-emetics to stop vomiting). Most people recover without any medical treatment within 5 days to a fortnight, but for some the recovery period is more prolonged.

What after effects can viral meningitis cause?

Most people recover with no noticeable effects...

The risk of contamination?

The risk of contamination is very low. Viral meningitis does not normally require public health measures to be taken because although some of the viruses that cause it are contagious, most people infected have no symptoms, or only very mild ones. A person with viral meningitis may pass on the virus, but this would be very unlikely to cause another person to develop viral meningitis as well.

Can viral meningitis be prevented?

Most causes of viral meningitis are not preventable, although a good general precaution against viral meningitis is attention to hand washing since many viruses often enter the body via the hand to mouth route.