

Meningitis (viral)

Meningitis is an infection of the membranes that cover the spinal cord and brain. Many different viruses can cause meningitis, including the ones that cause gastroenteritis, measles, mumps, chickenpox and herpes.

Symptoms include headache, fever, vomiting, neck stiffness, joint pain, drowsiness or confusion, and discomfort when looking at bright lights. Although symptoms may be severe, people usually recover completely.

How it spreads

How people get meningitis depends on the virus that causes it. Some viruses spread via droplets in the air that contain the virus. Others spread by touching a surface contaminated with droplets – for example, hands, tissues, toys or eating utensils – or by contact with infected faeces (poo).

Exclusion period

Exclude until the person is well.

Actions for educators and other staff

Tell a parent or carer immediately if their child has symptoms of meningitis.

Ensure staff and children have good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

If your child has symptoms of meningitis, contact your doctor immediately. If your doctor is not available, go to your nearest emergency department or call triple zero (000) and ask for an ambulance.

Do not send your child back to the education and care service until they feel well again.

Teach your child to cough or sneeze into a tissue, then throw the tissue into a bin and wash their hands. If there are no tissues nearby, teach them to cough or sneeze into their inner elbow instead of their hands.

Make sure your child washes their hands thoroughly and often.

More information about meningitis

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of meningitis (healthdirect.gov.au/meningitis).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.