



## Viral Meningitis

Viral meningitis, also known as "aseptic meningitis", is the most common type of meningitis and is most often seen in children.

It is a milder disease than bacterial meningitis and is rarely fatal. People with viral meningitis may have severe symptoms, but they usually recover completely. There is no specific drug treatment for viral meningitis.

This type of meningitis will normally get better on its own without causing any serious problems. Most people feel better within seven to 10 days. In the meantime you may be advised by GP to:

- Get plenty of rest
- Take anti-sickness medicine for any vomiting
- Take painkillers for a headache or general aches

### Prevention

Vaccination are available for meningococcal, pneumococcal and haemophilus infection. There is no vaccination available for viral meningitis.

## How can I contact a member of the Infection Prevention & Control Team?

Tell the Clinical Nurse Manager, Doctor or Nurse looking after you if you would like to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention & Control Team and they will contact us.

We have made every possible effort to make sure that all the information provided in this leaflet is true, accurate, complete and up to date at the time of publication

**References** | Hse.ie



Tallaght  
University  
Hospital

Ospidéal  
Ollscoile  
Thamhlachta

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## Bacterial & Viral Meningitis



# What is Meningitis?



Meningitis is a swelling or inflammation of the lining (membranes) around the brain and spinal cord. The swelling can be caused by a number of different bacteria, viruses and fungi.

There are three covers/layers of the brain and spinal cord referred to as meninges this is where the name Meningitis comes from. Meningitis is usually caused by the germs from a bacterial or viral infection. As a result there are two main types of meningitis - bacterial, and viral. Much more rarely, meningitis can be due to other causes such as severe types of fungal infection or tuberculosis.

## What is Meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is the most common bacterial cause of meningitis in Ireland. Other causes of meningitis include pneumococcal disease, Haemophilus and group B streptococcal disease. Thanks to vaccination programmes some of these strains have been greatly reduced.

## How do you get meningococcal disease?

The bacteria which cause meningococcal meningitis and meningococcal sepsis can live naturally in the back of the nose and throat. It is spread by droplets such as coughing, sneezing or kissing. Up to one in 10 people may carry this bacteria. Only a small minority of carriers will develop meningitis or sepsis.

# What is meningococcal sepsis?

Septicaemia is a form of blood infection caused by the same organism that causes meningitis.

## Symptoms and signs of Meningitis, sepsis and Meningococcal disease include:

- High temperature
- Cold hands & feet (with a high temperature)
- Vomiting
- Muscle & joint pain
- Breathing quickly
- A stiff neck
- A headache
- A dislike of bright lights
- Spots or a rash
- Being very sleepy or difficult to wake

A person can be confused and disoriented or have fitting episodes.

It is important to note that not all of these symptoms may appear. If you are concerned you should get medical help immediately.



# Rash

Both adults and children can have a **rash**. If bacteria is in the bloodstream, it can release toxins. The toxins damage the walls of blood vessels causing a leakage of blood under the skin. The appearance of the rash can vary.

The rash can start as tiny blood spots which look like red pin-prick type marks which if untreated *can* spread to form bruises or blood blisters. **Do not wait for a rash to appear.** It may be the last sign to appear and it can spread very quickly.

If you see or suspect a rash seek medical attention immediately.

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