



# Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • [www.scdhec.gov](http://www.scdhec.gov)

## *Viral Meningitis*

<p><b>What is <i>Viral Meningitis</i>?</b></p>	<p>Meningitis is an inflammation of the tissue around the spinal cord and brain. When this occurs, less blood and oxygen reach brain cells and this produces the symptoms outlined below. It is sometimes called Spinal Meningitis. It can be caused by either a virus or a bacteria. Meningitis caused by a virus is less severe than the one caused by bacteria.</p> <p>Viral meningitis is relatively common and can be caused by different viruses. The most common cause is from a group of viruses known as enteroviruses. These non-polio enteroviruses are second only to the "common cold" viruses, the rhinoviruses, as the most common viral infectious agents in humans. The enteroviruses infect an estimated 10-15 million or more people a year in the United States. However, fewer than 1 in 1,000 of the people infected with these viruses ever develop viral meningitis.</p>
<p><b>What are the symptoms?</b></p>	<p>The most common symptoms include a high fever, severe headache, stiff neck and sometimes a rash. Other symptoms might be nausea, vomiting, and confusion. People with these symptoms should see their doctor. The illness usually ends within 10 days and most people recover completely.</p>
<p><b>How is <i>Viral Meningitis</i> treated?</b></p>	<p>Most people recover completely on their own. The best treatment is supportive treatment, which includes rest, drinking plenty of fluids and over-the-counter medications to reduce the fever and headache.</p>
<p><b>How do people catch this disease?</b></p>	<p>The viruses that cause viral meningitis are very common. They can be spread through close, personal or prolonged contact with respiratory or oral secretions. Some of the viruses can also be spread through the oral-fecal route.</p>
<p><b>What can be done to prevent this disease?</b></p>	<p>The best prevention is frequent, thorough hand washing.</p>
<p><b>Is the public at risk?</b></p>	<p>There is no increased risk to the general public. Even close personal contacts (household, personal care workers) are at only minimal increased risk. Most people infected with these viruses do not become sick.</p>