

# *Understanding* **MENINGITIS**

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**M**eningitis is an inflammation of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by an infection that was present someplace else in the body and spread through the blood and spinal fluid.

Most cases of meningitis are caused by a viral infection, but bacteria and fungus can also cause the condition, which is much more serious. Timely treatment is essential in this case. Viral and bacterial meningitis cause similar symptoms so testing is required to determine the form with which a person is infected.

To diagnose meningitis, a spinal tap may be ordered, in which some cerebrospinal fluid is removed and tested. If the meningitis is bacterial, the test helps determine which antibiotic to prescribe. If the meningitis is viral, it will resolve on its own.

## **Signs and Symptoms**

If you have symptoms of meningitis, call your doctor immediately. Early detection and treatment are very important to avoid serious health problems.

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Sensitivity to light
- Vomiting
- Confusion
- Sleepiness
- Stiff neck

## **Prevention**

You can decrease your risk of contracting meningitis by following these simple tips:

- Wash your hands often
- Cover your coughs and sneezes
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces
- Don't touch your eyes, nose and mouth
- Don't share things that go in your mouth, such as eating utensils, toothbrushes, or lipstick

*Source: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)*