

Meningitis and Encephalitis

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

Source

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). [Meningitis and Encephalitis Information Page](#).

Meningitis is an infection of the meninges, the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. Encephalitis is inflammation of the brain itself. Anyone can get encephalitis or meningitis. Causes of encephalitis and meningitis include viruses, bacteria, fungus, and parasites. Anyone experiencing symptoms of meningitis or encephalitis should see a doctor immediately.

Symptoms of encephalitis that might require emergency treatment include loss of consciousness, seizures, muscle weakness, or sudden severe dementia. Other symptoms include:

- sudden fever,
- headache,
- vomiting,
- heightened sensitivity to light,
- stiff neck and back,
- confusion and impaired judgment,
- drowsiness,
- weak muscles,
- a clumsy and unsteady gait,
- irritability.
- In more severe cases, people may have problems with speech or hearing, vision problems, and hallucinations.

Symptoms of meningitis, which may appear suddenly, often include:

- high fever,
- severe and persistent headache,
- stiff neck,
- nausea,

- sensitivity to bright light,
- vomiting, and
- changes in behavior such as confusion, sleepiness, and difficulty waking up.

In infants, symptoms of meningitis or encephalitis may include fever, vomiting, lethargy, body stiffness, unexplained irritability, and a full or bulging fontanel (the soft spot on the top of the head).