

- [Skip to main navigation](#)
- [Skip to main content](#)

Search

- [Request an Appointment](#)
- [Find a Doctor](#)
- [Find a Job](#)
- [Give Now](#)
- [Log in to Patient Account](#)
- [Translated Content](#)
 - [Espanol](#)
 - [Portuguese](#)
 - [Arabic](#)
 - [Mandarin](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Google](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [Pinterest](#)

- [Menu](#)
- [Search](#)

[All Mayo Clinic Topics](#)

- [Patient Care & Health Info](#)
 - [Healthy Lifestyle](#)
 - [Symptoms A-Z](#)
 - [Diseases & Conditions A-Z](#)
 - [Tests & Procedures A-Z](#)
 - [Drugs & Supplements A-Z](#)
 - [Appointments](#)
 - [Patient & Visitor Guide](#)
 - [Patient Online Services](#)

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 - [Doctors & Medical Staff](#)
 - [Medical Departments & Centers](#)
 - [Research Centers & Programs](#)
 - [About Mayo Clinic](#)
 - [Contact Us](#)

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- [Training Grant Positions](#)

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 - [Medical Products](#)
 - [Population Health and Wellness Programs](#)
 - [Health Plan Administration](#)
 - [Medical Laboratory Services](#)
 - [Continuing Education for Medical Professionals](#)
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 - [Give Now](#)
 - [Your Impact](#)
 - [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
 - [Contact Us](#)

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- [Request an Appointment](#)
- [Find a Doctor](#)
- [Find a Job](#)
- [Give Now](#)
- [Log in to Patient Account](#)
- [Espanol](#)
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[Meningitis](#)

[Print](#)

[Sections](#)

1. [Basics](#)
 1. [Definition](#)
 2. [Symptoms](#)
 3. [Causes](#)
 4. [Risk factors](#)
 5. [Complications](#)
 6. [Preparing for your appointment](#)
 7. [Tests and diagnosis](#)
 8. [Treatments and drugs](#)
 9. [Prevention](#)
- 2.
3. [In-Depth](#)
4. [Expert Answers](#)
5. [Multimedia](#)
6. [Resources](#)
7. [News From Mayo Clinic](#)
1. [Definition](#)
2. [Symptoms](#)
3. [Causes](#)
4. [Risk factors](#)
5. [Complications](#)
6. [Preparing for your appointment](#)
7. [Tests and diagnosis](#)

8. [Treatments and drugs](#)
9. [Prevention](#)

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Definition

[By Mayo Clinic Staff](#)

Meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes (meninges) surrounding your brain and spinal cord.

The swelling associated with meningitis often triggers the "hallmark" signs and symptoms of this condition, including headache, fever and a stiff neck.

Most cases of meningitis in the U.S. are caused by a viral infection, but bacterial and fungal infections also can lead to meningitis. Depending on the cause of the infection, meningitis can get better on its own in a couple of weeks — or it can be a life-threatening emergency requiring urgent antibiotic treatment.

If you suspect that you or someone in your family has meningitis, seek medical care right away. Early treatment of bacterial meningitis can prevent serious complications.

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March 19, 2013

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