

Diagnosis

Diagnosis of viral arthritis can be a bit tricky because there is no single presentation of symptoms that would be considered typical. The usual signs and symptoms—fever, rash, and joint pain—are also common to several other diseases and conditions. Since arthritis may precede signs of the viral infection, that too complicates the diagnostic process.

Serologic testing is the most effective way to establish the diagnosis of viral arthritis when a viral infection is suspected — or to pin down the cause of arthritis or arthralgia of unknown origin regardless. If a viral infection is suspected, serology should be performed immediately and again after 2 to 3 weeks.

- An acute IgM antibody response followed by IgG antibodies against a specific virus confirms a viral cause.
- An increase (4 times or more) in IgG over time is associated with recent infection whereby the initial blood sample was taken too late to detect IgM, It could also be indicative of reinfection or a recurrence.
- Stable IgG levels do not support the diagnosis of a recent viral infection. It may be indicative of an old viral infection not associated with arthritis which later developed.

Blood tests are also usually ordered in an effort to rule out other possible causes for the joint symptoms. For example, rheumatoid factor, anti-CCP, sed rate, and CRP would typically be ordered.²

Treatment

Treatment of viral arthritis focuses on symptom relief, as well as maintaining joint function. Analgesics and [nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs \(NSAIDs\)](#) may be prescribed. [Corticosteroids](#) are generally avoided, especially since they can mask or worsen the underlying viral disease. Physical therapy and occupational therapy can help preserve joint function. It should be noted though that most cases of viral arthritis are self-limiting (i.e., resolves without treatment).²

A Word From Verywell

It is in your best interest to take early symptoms to your doctor for an appropriate and accurate diagnosis. It is necessary to determine the type of arthritis so that it can be properly managed. In the case of viral arthritis, a [DMARD \(disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drug\)](#) would not be initiated as it often is to treat rheumatoid arthritis or other inflammatory types of arthritis. Bottom line — recognize early symptoms and consult your doctor.¹