Painful Stiff Neck Case Study

A white male, 17 years of age presented at the emergency room with a severe headache, vomiting, and a stiff neck with pain running up his back. On admission, his temperature was 101F. The young man appeared to have trouble hearing during the nurse’s interview and also seemed to have trouble concentrating.

The history revealed that the young man is a wrestler for the local high school team. He had felt as though he were getting a cold the past few days, since his last meet in Hicksville. He did not smoke or drink, but he had attended a party two days earlier thrown by his girlfriend and the other cheerleaders to celebrate his victory in the sectionals. He had been holding his weight at 162 for the season, so he ate little and did not drink on the day of meets (today is a day of the meet).

On physical exam, the physician noticed several areas of small purplish spots on the skin of the back, thigh and arm. The boy thought those were from wrestling.

1. What is the most likely diagnosis?
2. Which signs and symptoms were critical factors in your diagnosis?
3. What may happen if the patient does not receive treatment?