

West Nile Virus



Reduce the Risk



West Nile Virus Information Line 1-800-580-0038

West Nile virus can cause an infection in the brain and can affect people and animals. The virus has been found in Europe, Asia, and Africa for many years. West Nile virus was first discovered in North America in 1999 and has now spread over much of the continent.

West Nile virus is most commonly spread by the bites of infected mosquitoes. Mosquitoes become infected while feeding on the blood of infected birds. Some wild birds can have the virus and not become ill. Other birds do become ill and die.

Most people who become infected with West Nile virus have no symptoms at all, or they may experience only mild flu-like symptoms that can include fever, headache, body aches, mild rash, or swollen lymph glands.

For most people, the risk of becoming seriously ill from West Nile virus is very low. People with weaker immune systems, including people over the age of 40 and people with chronic diseases, are at greater risk for serious health effects. However, West Nile virus can cause severe illness in people of any age or any health status.

In very few cases, West Nile virus can cause an inflammation of the tissue surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or can cause an inflammation of the brain (encephalitis). Symptoms can include a severe headache, high fever, stiff neck, vomiting, drowsiness, confusion, muscle weakness, loss of consciousness, and may even result in death.

Many of the serious symptoms and complications of West Nile virus can be treated. There is currently no vaccine to protect people against the virus.

Bird Surveillance

The first indication of the arrival of West Nile virus is often an increase in dead birds, especially members of the crow family. You can help with bird surveillance efforts to track the virus. Dead crows, ravens, gray jays and blue jays can be reported to the West Nile Virus Information Line at 1-800-580-0038. Screening will occur on all reports. Birds that are members of the crow family, which are in suitable condition for testing (for example, not decaying), will be picked up by Public Health staff and will be sent for West Nile virus testing. Birds that do not fit the requirements for testing, as determined by the screening process, should be safely disposed of by the land owner using precautionary measures such as wearing disposable plastic gloves and hand washing.

Prevent Mosquito Bites

West Nile virus is most commonly spread by the bites of infected mosquitoes. To help reduce the risk, take the following precautions.

- Make sure door and window screens fit tightly and are free of holes to prevent mosquitoes entering homes.
- Minimize time spent outdoors at dawn or dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.

- Wear light-colored clothing, long-sleeved tops, long pants, and socks when outdoors, or consider special screen mesh clothing (screen jackets, suits and head nets) available at most hardware and department stores, as well as camping and outdoor supply shops.
- Use an insect repellent containing DEET or other Health Canada approved repellents. Information on Using Insect Repellents that Contain DEET:
 - Children under six months of age: Do not use insect repellents containing DEET.
 - Children aged six months to two years: In situations where high risks of complications from insect bites exist, the use of one application per day of DEET may be considered. The least concentrated product (10% DEET or less) should be used.
 - Children between two to twelve years of age: The least concentrated product (10% DEET or less) should be used. Do not apply more than three times per day. Do not apply to face and hands. Avoid prolonged use.
 - Adults and individuals twelve years of age or older: Do not use products containing more than 30% DEET. Products with lower concentration of DEET are as effective as higher concentration but for a shorter period of time.

West Nile virus can affect horses and has caused death in a number of horses. A vaccine for horses is currently available. For more information contact your veterinarian. West Nile virus rarely causes illness in cats and dogs.

Eliminate Mosquito Breeding Sites

You can help reduce the risk of West Nile virus infection by preventing mosquito bites and eliminating mosquito breeding sites around your home. Mosquitoes need water to breed. Eggs and larvae can develop in small amounts of water that have been standing still for a couple of days. Mosquitoes do not travel far. To reduce the risk of exposure to mosquitoes, take the following steps to eliminate mosquito breeding sites in your yard.

- Regularly empty standing water from objects in the yard like pool covers, flower pots, children's toys, pet bowls, etc.
- Clean rain gutters regularly so water does not collect.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Change water in birdbaths twice weekly.
- Aerate ornamental ponds or stock them with fish that eat mosquito larvae.
- Remove debris that can hold rainwater, like old tires.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools that are not being used and keep the pool water circulating.
- Use landscape to eliminate standing water that collects on your property.

For more information, please contact your local Public Health Office, call the West Nile Virus Information Line at 1-800-580-0038, or visit the Department of Health and Wellness web site at www.gnb.ca, keyword: Health. You can also visit Health Canada's web site at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/wnv-vwn/index.html

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