

RISK ALERT

WEST NILE VIRUS UPDATE FOR 2005

It is more important than ever to protect yourself from mosquito bites due to the rapid spread of the West Nile Virus (WNV) in North America.

The West Nile Virus (WNV), first detected in the West Nile district of Uganda, has taken root in North America. WNV was first discovered in North America in New York City, the summer of 1999. Since then, it has spread to many other US states and into Canada.

WNV is contracted from the bite of an infected mosquito. The mosquitoes get the virus from biting infected birds, and can then infect humans and some animals. Most mosquito bites do not lead to WNV, because very few mosquitoes are infected. However, seniors and those with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for serious illness from WNV infection.

Mild cases of WNV infections may include a slight fever and/or headache. More severe infections are marked by a rapid onset of a high fever with head and body aches, disorientation, tremors, and convulsions. In more severe cases, paralysis or death has occurred. Usually symptoms occur from 5 to 15 days after exposure.

Anyone who experiences the sudden onset of the symptoms listed above should seek immediate medical attention. While there is no specific treatment, medication, cure or vaccination for WNV, many of the symptoms of the disease can be treated, and most people infected with the virus recover.

In 2003, there were 1388 human infected cases and 14 deaths in Canada, due to WNV. These numbers dropped to 26 human cases and no deaths from WNV in 2004. Since the spread of WNV is not well understood, and the possibility that the number of affected persons may increase, the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission (WHSCC) maintains that workers and the general public should take measures to minimize mosquito bites.

PROTECT YOURSELF!

While everyone should know the facts, if you're an outdoor worker in particular, you should take steps to protect yourself.

1. Minimize time outdoors at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
2. Whenever possible, wear pants and long-sleeved tops when outside. Also, light-coloured clothing is less attractive to mosquitoes.
3. Use an insect repellent containing DEET (follow directions carefully).
4. Make sure that door and window screens fit tightly and are free of holes.
5. Mosquitoes need pools of standing water to breed. Take steps to reduce mosquito populations by eliminating standing water in your area.
6. Report any dead bird sightings to the New Brunswick WNV Information Line, by calling 1 800 580-0038.

Need More Info?

Additional information about WNV can be obtained from the local public health authority or from the following websites:

www.gnb.ca/0053/wnv-vno/index-e.asp

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/diseases/west_nile.html