



## WEST NILE VIRUS

### WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS?

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord). West Nile virus is found in several countries in the world. The virus was first detected in North America in 1999 and has since spread throughout most of the United States and Canada.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF WEST NILE VIRUS?

Most people who become infected have no symptoms at all. Symptoms can begin to appear three to fifteen days after infection. Some persons may experience mild flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache and body aches, develop a mild rash, or swollen lymph glands. Certain persons, especially the elderly, the young, and those with weak immune systems, are at a greater risk for more serious illness. In these cases, symptoms could include severe headache, high fever, stiff neck, vomiting, drowsiness, confusion, muscle weakness, and loss of consciousness.

### HOW IS WEST NILE VIRUS SPREAD?

West Nile virus is usually spread to a person by the bite of an infected female mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. A very rare method of transmission is by transfusion of blood products or organ donations from infected persons.

### WHO CAN GET WEST NILE VIRUS?

Anyone exposed to mosquitoes in an area where West Nile virus has been detected is at some degree of risk for infection.

### CAN WEST NILE VIRUS BE TREATED?

Although there is no specific treatment the symptoms and complications of the disease can be treated. Most persons who get this illness recover from it.

### HOW CAN WEST NILE VIRUS BE PREVENTED?

Prevent mosquito bites. Minimize time outdoors at dawn and dusk. Use an insect repellent containing DEET. Wear light-colored clothing and long sleeves, trousers and socks. Use screens on windows and doors. Reduce mosquito populations around your home and property by eliminating potential mosquito breeding sites of standing pools of water (for example, empty wading pools, remove old tires, clean rain gutters regularly).

For additional information, contact your regional Public Health office or your family doctor.