



# Fact Sheet: West Nile Virus

## How do people get infected with West Nile virus?

The usual way for humans to get West Nile Virus is through the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected when it feeds on the blood of a bird that has the virus. It is normally passed between mosquitoes and birds. You can't normally catch it from someone who has been infected.

## What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?

Most people infected with West Nile Virus will experience no symptoms at all, while some develop mild flu symptoms lasting a week or less. Symptoms include fever, headache and body aches. There may also be a rash on the trunk of the body and swollen lymph glands. In less than one per cent of cases, West Nile Virus can cause meningitis (inflammation of the brain). Elders are most at risk for severe illness.

## What is the risk of West Nile Virus in Nunavut?

Mosquitoes in Nunavut are not the kind that spread the disease, so the risk of infection here is very low. However, Nunavummiut could become infected while traveling in the south in areas affected with West Nile virus. It is very important that every person leaving the territory for southern travel learn how to protect themselves and their families.

## When is the risk greatest?

In southern Canada, West Nile Virus is most common during mosquito season, usually from mid-May until hard frost (late September-October)

## How do I protect myself from getting West Nile Virus

Any activity that either prevents mosquitoes from biting or prevents them from breeding will help to further reduce the risk of infection. To protect you and your family from mosquito bites while in areas with reported West Nile virus activity:

- Wear baggy, long sleeved shirts and pants
- Wear light-colored clothing since dark colors attract mosquitoes
- Use mosquito repellent that contains DEET. The amount of DEET in repellents should not be more than 30 per cent for adults or 10 per cent for children. DEET should not be used on children under 6 months of age. Read the instructions carefully before applying.
- Avoid areas where mosquitoes may bite during the day and protect yourself if you are.

## What is the Department of Health & Social Services doing about West Nile Virus?

**1) Education:** Mosquitoes that spread West Nile Virus have not been found in any community in Nunavut. However, residents of Nunavut travel south often, so the Department of Health & Social Services is providing information on what West Nile Virus is and how people can protect themselves and their families.

**2) Human Surveillance:** Clinical information on diagnosis and testing will be provided to health care providers in the hospital and health centres to ensure that people who may have been infected in the south are detected early.

**3) Dead bird surveillance:** The Division of Wildlife, Department of the Environment, in partnership with Hunter & Trapper Associations, will advise members on collecting samples of dead birds they may encounter on the land.