



West Nile Virus: Fact Sheet #1

Health Information

Currently there is **a very low risk** of West Nile Virus in the Northwest Territories.

What is West Nile virus infection?

The West Nile virus infection is spread by the bite of infected mosquitoes and usually causes a mild illness, although some people may get a more serious disease such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). This virus is named after the West Nile region of Uganda where the virus was first isolated in 1937. It caused an outbreak in New York in 1999, and 325 cases in Canada in 2002, mostly in southern Ontario.

Who gets West Nile virus infection?

Anyone can get West Nile virus infection if bitten by an infected mosquito. In areas where transmission of West Nile virus is known to be occurring only a small proportion of mosquitoes are likely to be infected. Even if an infected mosquito bites a person, the chance of developing illness is approximately 1 in 200 people. People who are over age 50 are at greater risk of severe illness.

How is West Nile virus spread?

West Nile Virus is primarily a disease that affects birds. However, it can be spread to humans by mosquitoes that have become infected by biting a sick bird. West Nile virus is not usually spread from one person to another, or directly from birds to humans.

What are the symptoms of West Nile virus infection?

The illness can range from mild to severe. In the milder forms of this disease, symptoms may include fever and muscle aches, swollen lymph glands and sometimes a skin rash. The more severe cases of infection are usually seen in the elderly or people with a weakened immune system. In such cases, symptoms include sudden fever, intense headache, and stiff neck and confusion, indicative of encephalitis or meningitis. On the other hand, healthy children and adults may not have any symptoms at all.



How can West Nile virus infection be prevented?

It can be prevented by controlling the mosquito population and protecting against mosquito bites.

1. Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.
2. If possible, stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active (dawn and dusk).
3. Use insect repellent products (up to 35% DEET for adults but less than 10% for children).
4. Turn over or remove containers in your yard where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, buckets and toys.
5. Eliminate standing water on tarps or flat roofs.
6. Clean out birdbaths and wading pools once a week.
7. Clean roof gutters and downspout screens.

For further information:

Contact the Office of The Chief Medical Health Officer at (867) 920-8877.

Visit the following websites:

www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca – NWT Department of Health and Social Services (See Programs & Services Section)

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/wnv-vno/index_e.html – Health Canada