

Protect yourself from West Nile virus

Avoid mosquito bites - your first line of defence

Why is it necessary to protect yourself from mosquito bites?

Summer is here, and it is important to protect yourself from mosquitos that may be infected with West Nile virus **because one bite from an infected mosquito can make you sick.**

How can you get West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is mainly transmitted to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. It can affect anyone, but people with chronic diseases or weakened immune systems are especially at risk. West Nile virus can also be spread by blood-to-blood contact with an infected person or animal.

Most people display no signs of being infected with the virus, while others develop flu-like symptoms (fever, body aches, headache). Your chances of becoming seriously ill are low, but your risk increases with age.

How can you protect yourself and your family from mosquito bites and West Nile virus?

Use an insect repellent that contains DEET or other approved ingredients.

If you go outdoors, wear light-coloured clothing, a long-sleeved shirt, long pants and a hat when mosquitoes are active in your area.

Mosquito netting can be used over playpens and strollers when used outside.

Get rid of as much standing water as you can from around your home. Drain pool covers, old tires, rain barrel lids, flower pots, and children's toys in the spring and summer. Store upside down any items in which rainwater is likely to collect, such as boats, wheelbarrows and wading pools. Replace water in bird baths and outdoor pet dishes at least twice a week.

Make sure your door and window screens are in good repair.

Do not touch any dead birds you find. Report them to your local Community Health Centre or Nursing Station, who will advise you how they can be disposed of safely.

If you handle wild game when you are hunting, trapping or fishing, it is important to wear rubber gloves. Make sure that any open wounds on your hands or arms are fully covered. Wash your gloves and your bare hands well after handling wild game. There is no evidence that people can get West Nile virus from eating infected wild game that is cooked properly.

Is insect repellent containing DEET safe?

Yes. Health Canada recommends insect repellents containing 5% to 30% DEET. DEET has a 40-year history of safe use in North America. Use only insect repellents that are registered in Canada.

Directions for applying insect repellent:

Always read and follow the directions on the container, especially when using an insect repellent on young children.

Only a thin layer of repellent is needed. Use only on skin surfaces that are not covered by clothing. Spray some on your clothing, too.

Choose a product that meets your needs. For example, if you plan to be outdoors for short periods of time, choose a product with a lower concentration of repellent and reapply only if you need longer protection.

Wash skin with soap and water when you return indoors after using insect repellents that contain DEET or when you no longer need protection.

Do not put repellent on children's faces and hands. This will reduce their chances of getting it in their eyes and mouth.

You can use both sunscreen and insect repellent when you are outdoors. Apply the sunscreen first, followed by the insect repellent.

Guidelines for using insect repellent:

Do not use DEET on infants below the age of 6 months.

For young children aged 6 months to 2 years, use only if there is a high risk of mosquito bites, and then use only once a day (use product containing 10% DEET or less).

For children 2 to 12 years of age, use no more than 3 times a day (10% DEET or less). Avoid using over a long period.

For adults and children over 12 years of age, Health Canada recommends approved insect repellents containing 5% to 30% DEET.

Do not use repellent on open wounds or on skin that is sore or sunburned.

Do not put on repellent unless you are going outdoors.

Is there a specific time of day when you should use insect repellent?

No. Mosquitoes can bite at any time - day or night - depending on where you are in Canada.

For more information on West Nile virus, contact your Community Health Centre or Nursing Station. You can also visit Health Canada's West Nile virus Web site at: www.westnilevirus.gc.ca or call 1-800-816-7292 (toll free).

