



West Nile Virus & Yukon

- West Nile virus (WNV) has not been found in mosquitoes, mammals, birds or humans in Yukon.
- As of June 2004, WNV had not been found in a jurisdiction bordering on Yukon however jurisdictions are preparing for the possibility that it will arrive this summer.
- Yukon has the carriers (birds and mosquitoes) present to support WNV activity at some level.
- One Yukon resident was diagnosed with WNV last summer but this individual contracted the disease in Saskatchewan.

Travelling outside the Yukon

- Yukoners travelling at home or across the North, are at a low risk of being infected with WNV.
- However, travelling to southern Canada, the U.S., Mexico or the Caribbean, increases the risk of being infected. Travellers should take precautions to protect themselves and their families from mosquito bites. Protection tips are listed below.

WNV infections

- WNV is transmitted through mosquito bites to humans and animals.
- Most people who become infected will experience no symptoms at all.
- About 20% of those infected will develop symptoms, such as fever, headache and body aches lasting one week or less. Some persons will develop a rash.
- In rare cases (less than 1%), WNV infection can result in serious health effects such as meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain), encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or other serious disease of the central nervous system including polio-like paralysis.

The origin and spread of WNV

- WNV was first identified in Uganda in 1937 and was historically found in parts of Southern Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.
- Since its discovery in North America in New York in 1999, WNV has moved rapidly north into Canada and south as far as Florida. WNV has also moved steadily west across the continent to the West Coast of the United States.
- It has spread to nearly all 48 continental US states, and seven Canadian provinces.

WNV and the very wide range of animal species

- In nature, WNV exists in a cycle passing between birds and mosquitoes.
- Many bird species can be infected with WNV, but members of the crow family, known as corvids (ravens, magpies and jays) have a relatively high death rate when infected and are often the earliest to show infection.

- For this reason, testing samples of dead corvids for WNV is an effective way of determining when the virus is active in an area.

If you find A dead bird

You can play an important role in monitoring for WNV by reporting dead birds to your nearest Environment Yukon office. Dead birds may be an indicator that the virus is in an area, but birds also die from other causes such as starvation, old age or food poisoning.

- Do not pick up the birds unless you are familiar with safety precautions. Please call your nearest Environment Yukon office. Environment Yukon Conservation Officers and Regional Biologists have specific instructions on how to handle dead birds. It is best to assume that any specimen could be infectious and to take proper precautions at all times.

Personal Prevention Measures

1. Minimize your exposure to mosquitoes:

- When going outdoors, use insect repellents that contain DEET or other approved ingredients.
- Try to avoid spending time outdoors at dawn and at dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, long pants and a hat. Light coloured clothing is best because mosquitoes tend to be more attracted to dark colours.
- Make sure that door and window screens fit tightly and have no holes that may allow mosquitoes indoors.

2. Eliminate mosquito breeding sites around your home and cabin:

Mosquitoes lay eggs in standing water and it takes about four days for the eggs to grow into adults that are ready to fly. Even a small amount of water, for example, in a saucer under a flowerpot, is enough to act as a breeding ground. Therefore, it is important to eliminate as much standing water around your property as possible by:

- Regularly draining standing water from items like pool covers, saucers under flowerpots, recycle bins, garbage cans etc.
- Remove any unused items from around your property including old tires that have a tendency to collect water.
- Change the water in wading pools, bird baths, pet bowls and livestock watering tanks twice a week.
- Cover rain barrels with screens.
- Clean out eaves troughs regularly to prevent clogs that can trap water.
- If you have an ornamental pond, consider getting fish that will eat mosquito larvae.

A Word About DEET

The most effective repellents contain DEET (N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide), which is an ingredient used to repel pests like mosquitoes and ticks. DEET has been tested against a variety of biting insects and has been very effective. The more DEET a repellent contains the longer time it can protect you from mosquito bites. A higher percentage of DEET in a repellent does not mean that your protection is better—just that it will last longer. DEET concentrations higher than 50% do not increase the length of protection.

DEET is the most effective and best-studied insect repellent available. Studies using humans and mosquitoes report that only products containing DEET offer long-lasting protection after a single application.

Products containing DEET are very safe when used according to the directions. Because DEET is so widely used, a great deal of testing has been done. Over the long history of DEET use, very few confirmed incidents of toxic reactions to DEET have occurred when the product is used properly.

You can use insect repellent and sunscreen together. Apply the sunscreen first, and then the insect repellent.

DEET and children

No definitive studies exist in the scientific literature about what concentration of DEET is safe for children. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention note that no serious illness has arisen from use of DEET when used according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

Current labels on insect repellents containing DEET state that these products are not to be used on children under the age of 2 years (infants or toddlers). It is now recommended, in light of the PMRA's re-evaluation of DEET, which included input from the Canadian Paediatric Society, that:

On children under six months of age

- insect repellents containing DEET still not be used

On children aged six months to 2 years

- the use of 1 application per day may be considered in situations where a high risk of complications from insect bites exist
- the product be applied sparingly and not be applied to the face and hands;
- only the least concentrated product (10% DEET or less) should be used
- prolonged use be avoided

On children between 2-12 years of age

- the least concentrated product (10% DEET or less) be used and that it be applied no more than 3 times per day.

Parents should choose the type and concentration of repellent to be used by taking into account the amount of time that a child would be outdoors, exposure to mosquitoes, and the risk of mosquito-transmitted disease in the area. Persons who are concerned about using DEET or other products on children may wish to consult their health care provider for advice.