



West Nile Virus Information



Once West Nile virus (WNV) enters B.C., anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts should know how to protect themselves from infection. Since WNV is a mosquito-borne virus, the usual way for people to become infected is from the bite of an infected mosquito. Preventing mosquito bites will prevent infection with WNV. By the end of 2006, the virus was detected in Alberta, in Washington State and in counties of Montana bordering southwestern B.C.

Risk Factors

Even in areas where mosquitoes do carry the virus, very few mosquitoes—much less than 1%—are infected. If bitten by an infected mosquito and infection results, 80% of people will experience no symptoms at all, 20% will develop milder symptoms such as headache, fever and muscle aches, and fewer than 1% will get severely ill. The severe illness may include meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord), encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or polio-like paralysis. However even milder illness may cause lasting health effects, including continued muscle weakness, memory problems and fatigue. People over 50 years of age are most at risk for severe illness.

Reducing the Risk While Angling

When angling in undeveloped areas during the mosquito season (mid-May to mid-September), there are some very effective things you can do to prevent mosquito bites and reduce your risk of infection.

- **Wear protective clothing** Avoid dark-coloured clothes, because they attract mosquitoes. Full-length pants and a long-sleeved shirt are recommended.
- **Use mosquito repellent** A recent Health Canada review

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considers DEET to be both safe and highly effective when used correctly. Thoroughly apply a mosquito repellent containing DEET to your uncovered skin by rubbing it in. The percentage of DEET in repellents should not exceed 30% for adults or 10% for children. DEET should not be used on children under 6 months of age. *New products containing all-natural repellents are effective for shorter time periods than DEET products – make sure to reapply the product according to the directions.* Some common repellents that do NOT work are bug zappers, audible mosquito repellents (send out sound waves to deter mosquitoes), and Citrosa plants. In situations where you need to use both sunscreen and mosquito

repellent, apply the sunscreen first.

- **Avoid peak biting times** Consider staying indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening, when most mosquito bites occur.

Treatment if Infected

Although there is no specific treatment, medication or cure for WNV infection, many of the symptoms and complications of the disease can be treated. Most people who are infected with WNV recover. There is no vaccine for WNV at this time.

Fight the Bite in 2007

For more information about WNV, visit the B.C. Centre for Disease Control's website at www.bccdc.org. There is every reason to expect the introduction of WNV to B.C. during 2007 – we have the right climate, the right mosquito species and the birds necessary to sustain transmission. This year, enjoy the outdoors, but 'Fight the Bite' – cover up and wear mosquito repellent!