

West Nile Virus

Public Information Sheet

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is a cause of encephalitis, which means inflammation of the brain. West Nile virus spreads through mosquito bites and can infect people, horses, and birds.

What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?

Most people who get West Nile virus infection never have any symptoms at all. A few people have mild symptoms, such as fever, headache, and body aches. These people recover without any treatment.

Very few people with West Nile virus infection are sick enough to go to the hospital. These people have a more severe illness with fever, fatigue, confusion, headache, weakness, nausea, vomiting, muscle aches, stiff neck, abdominal pain, and other symptoms. About 10% of people hospitalized with West Nile virus die from the infection.

Who is most at risk for West Nile virus?

People over age 50 are most at risk. People who go out-of-doors in summer without taking precautions against mosquitoes may also be at higher risk.

Is West Nile virus a problem in West Virginia?

Many counties in West Virginia have had birds test positive for West Nile Virus. West Virginia has reported 0 to 3 cases in people and 0 to 4 cases in horses each year since 2002.

How is West Nile virus spread?

West Nile spreads through mosquito bites. You cannot get West Nile from a person who has the disease.

How can I protect my family from West Nile virus?

Remove standing water to get rid of mosquitoes:

- Get rid of old tires and trash around your home.
- Punch holes in the bottoms of trash barrels so they don't hold water.
- At least once or twice a week, clean and empty water from flowerpots, birdbaths, swimming pool covers, buckets, barrels and cans.
- Check for clogged rain gutters and clean them out so they drain properly.
- Maintain swimming pools or drain them completely.

Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors.

Avoid outside activities when mosquitoes are active.

Infectious Disease Epidemiology

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Use insect repellent on bare skin.

- DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR3535 are effective.
- Follow package directions carefully.
- Apply sparingly to children and wash them with soap and water when they come indoors. Avoid application to the hands and face of young children.

Make sure doors and screens are bug tight.

Contact your doctor if you feel ill.

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