WEST NILE VIRUS

Use Protection. Avoid Infection.

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

WNV causes a potentially serious illness that affects the central nervous system. It can be life-altering or fatal. West Nile encephalitis and West Nile meningitis (inflammation of the brain or the area around the brain) and West Nile polio-like paralysis are the most severe diseases that the virus can cause.

How is it spread?

WNV is usually spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes carry the virus after they become infected from feeding on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can spread WNV to humans and other animals that they bite.

Who gets sick?

People of all ages can become ill from a single mosquito bite. The risk of severe illness and death is higher for people age 50 and over. In 2004, more than 60 percent of severe WNV cases and 95 percent of the deaths due to WNV infection were people age 50 and older. People who spend a lot of time outdoors also have a greater risk of getting bitten and possibly infected.

What are the symptoms?

A few people will develop severe illness, including a high fever, headache, neck stiffness, and/or disorientation. If you develop severe symptoms, seek medical attention immediately. Some people who become infected have milder symptoms (headache, aches, tiredness, possible rash) that typically last a few days—but can last much longer, even in healthy people. Fortunately, most people infected with WNV develop no symptoms of illness.

Three ways to reduce the risk

#1: Avoid bites.

Spray your skin or clothing with insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus when you go outdoors. Permethrin also can be used on clothing, shoes, bed nets, and camping gear, but not on skin.

Use repellents carefully. Always follow label instructions. Repellents containing DEET and picaridin may be used for adults and children. Oil of lemon eucalyptus may be used for children ages 3 and older. Do not put repellent on a child's hands because it may get in their mouth or eyes.

Cover up. Wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks sprayed with repellent while outdoors can help prevent bites. Do not spray repellent on the skin underneath clothing.

Avoid mosquitoes. Limit the time you spend outdoors from dusk to dawn when many mosquitoes bite.

#2: Mosquito-proof your home.

Check your screens. Keep mosquitoes outside by fixing or installing window and door screens.

Drain standing water. A small amount of water can be enough for a mosquito to lay her eggs.

Look for and eliminate breeding places weekly. Empty water from buckets, cans, pool covers, flower pots, and other items.

#3: Help your community.

By reporting cases of dead birds, you can help health departments track WNV. Check with local or state health departments to find out their policy for reporting dead birds. Support your community's mosquito control program. If none exists, ask about starting one.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/westnile or call the CDC public response hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO or 1-888-232-6348 (TTY).

PROTECTION BASICS

Protect yourself and your family from mosquito bites that spread the West Nile virus (WNV):

- Know that one bite from an infected mosquito can make you ill.
- Be aware of your risk. Anyone can get sick from WNV, but adults 50+ are at a higher risk.
- Use mosquito repellent outdoors and re-apply it as needed.
- Cover-up with long sleeves and pants.
- Drain standing water where mosquitoes breed.

FIGHT THE BITE

CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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