

West Nile Virus (WNV)

Public Information Sheet

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is a cause of encephalitis (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. Some people have mild symptoms, such as fever, headache, and body aches. These people recover without any treatment.

A 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. Among people that develop a severe illness, 3%-15% people may die from the infection. However, less than 1% of people that become infected with West Nile virus develop a severe illness.

Who is most at risk for West Nile virus?

People over age 50 are most at risk. People who go outdoors in the summer without taking precautions against mosquito bites 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. Mosquitoes positive for West Nile virus have also been found in several counties in the state. Few cases (0 to 4) in horses are reported each year. Until 2012, 0 to 3 human cases of West Nile were reported each year. However, 9 human cases of West Nile virus were detected in people during 2012.

How is West Nile virus spread?

West Nile virus spreads through mosquito bites. West Nile virus is not spread through casual contact with a person who has the virus, such as touching or kissing.

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.

Infectious Disease Epidemiology

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Page 1 of 2



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- 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.
- Maintain ditches so that stagnant water does not accumulate.
- Maintain septic systems properly

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

Avoid outside activities when mosquitoes are active.

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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Page 2 of 2