

West Nile Virus General Information Fact Sheet

What Are The Symptoms Of West Nile Virus (WNV)?

Most people infected with WNV will not show symptoms. Some, however, may have a fever, headache, body aches, and swollen lymph nodes. A small number may develop encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the spinal cord). Although rare, death can occur.

How Is It Spread?

West Nile virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. There is no recorded proof of it being passed from person-to-person, animal-to-animal, or animal-to-person.

Can animals be infected with WNV?

Yes. However, the only domestic animals that appear to be harmfully affected by WNV are equines, such as horses. Wild birds can also develop severe symptoms and may have large die offs.

Where Has It Been and Where Is It Going?

West Nile virus is commonly found in Africa, Eastern Europe, West Asia, and the Middle East. It was first detected in the United States in 1999, during which time there was an outbreak of it in New York. By mid-June of 2002, it had traveled to the eastern portion of Texas. Since then, it has been reported in mosquitoes, birds (such as blue jays and crows), horses, and humans in Texas. There has also been a continued westward movement of the virus.

Can It Be Treated?

There is no specific treatment for WNV infection. In a serious case, a person may have to be hospitalized and given supportive treatment along with good nursing care.

How Can I Reduce My Chances Of Being Infected?

1. Stay indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening.
2. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors.
3. Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. An effective repellent may contain 35% DEET. Repellents may bother the eyes and mouth, so try to not apply them to the hands of children.
4. Spray clothing with insect repellents containing permethrin or DEET, as mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing.
5. Whenever you use an insect repellent, be sure to read and follow the directions for use that are printed on the product label.
6. It does not appear that a person can get WNV from handling live or dead infected birds. However, use gloves or double plastic bags when handling any dead animals, including birds.
7. If you leave your house windows open, make sure they have screens.
8. Do not allow water to stagnate in old tires, flowerpots, trash containers, swimming pools, birdbaths, pet bowls, etc.