

WEST NILE VIRUS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is sometimes called “neuroinvasive disease” because it affects a person’s nervous system. West Nile Virus infection can cause inflammation of the brain and spinal cord. Approximately 80% of people who are infected will not show any symptoms at all, while 20% of people who become infected will have mild symptoms lasting from a few days to a few weeks, and one out of 150 persons will develop severe illness.

How is West Nile Virus spread?

WNV is transmitted to humans primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes acquire the virus by feeding on infected birds and then transmit the virus to humans and other animals during subsequent feedings. A very small number of cases have been spread through infected blood transfusions, organ transplants and during pregnancy from mother to baby. WNV is not transmitted through casual contact. Symptoms can develop 2-14 days after exposure, but usually occur 2-6 days after exposure.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for WNV infection. Milder WNV infection may improve on its own or a person may seek medical attention. Those experiencing a severe headache, stiff neck, high fever or disorientation should seek immediate medical attention. Severe WNV usually requires hospitalization. Treatment is supportive. Intravenous fluids, airway management, and respiratory support may be needed. Persons over the age of 50 are more likely to develop serious symptoms of WNV.

What can we do to prevent West Nile Virus?

The best way to protect yourself is to prevent mosquitoes from biting you. Reduce mosquito bites by:

- √ Avoid shaded areas where mosquitoes may be resting.
- √ Limit evening outdoor activity when mosquitoes are most active.
- √ Wear protective clothing such as long sleeved shirts and pants.
- √ When outdoors use an insect repellent. The most effective repellent for use on the skin and clothing is DEET. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using formulations of no more than 30% DEET on infants and children and not using DEET on infants younger than two months of age.
- √ Maintain window and door screening to keep mosquitoes out of buildings.
- √ Mosquito populations can be reduced on your property by eliminating standing water that collects in birdbaths, boats, buckets, tires, unused pools, roof gutters, and other containers.

SYMPTOMS OF WEST NILE VIRUS

Mild symptoms:

- fever
- headache
- body aches
- sometimes a skin rash and swollen lymph glands
- nausea, vomiting

Serious symptoms:

- severe headache
- high fever
- stiff neck
- disorientation
- coma
- tremors
- paralysis

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