

# West Nile FAQs

## Related Questions

### **Besides mosquitoes, can you get West Nile virus directly from other insects or ticks?**

Infected mosquitoes are the primary source for West Nile virus. There is no information to suggest that ticks transmit West Nile virus to people.

### **Can you get West Nile virus directly from birds?**

West Nile virus cannot spread directly from birds to people. However, dead birds should not be handled with bare hands. Use gloves to carefully place dead birds in a double plastic bag and then place the dead birds in the outdoor trash.

### **How is West Nile encephalitis treated?**

There is no specific therapy. In more severe cases, intensive supportive therapy is indicated, i.e., hospitalization, intravenous (IV) fluids and nutrition, airway management, ventilatory support (ventilator) if needed, prevention of secondary infections (pneumonia, urinary tract, etc.), and good nursing care.

### **How long does it take to get sick if bitten by an infected mosquito?**

Being bitten by an infected mosquito will not necessarily make you sick since most people who are infected with West Nile virus have no symptoms or experience mild illness. If illness were to occur, it would occur within 5 to 15 days of being bitten by an infected mosquito.

# **Is there a vaccine against West Nile virus?**

No.

## **Q: How is West Nile virus spread?**

West Nile virus is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. You cannot get West Nile virus from a person who has the disease. West Nile virus is not spread by person-to-person contact such as touching, kissing, or caring for someone who is infected.

## **Should I report dead birds?**

The public can assist in monitoring for the virus during the summer months by reporting dead birds. Remember that West Nile cannot be spread directly from birds, however, use gloves to place dead birds in a double plastic bag. The birds can then be disposed of in a garbage container.

## **What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?**

Most people who are infected with West Nile virus have no symptoms or experience mild illness such as a fever, headache and body aches before fully recovering. In outbreaks in other parts of the world, some persons also developed a mild rash or swollen lymph glands. In some individuals, particularly the elderly, West Nile virus can cause serious disease that affects brain tissue. At its most serious, it can cause permanent neurological damage and can be fatal. Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) symptoms include the rapid onset of severe headache, high fever, stiff neck, confusion, loss of consciousness (coma), and muscle weakness. Death may result in some cases.

## **What can I do around my home to help reduce exposure to mosquitoes?**

Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water. Weeds, tall grass, and bushes provide an outdoor home for the adult *Culex pipiens* mosquito (the common house mosquito) which is most commonly associated with West Nile virus. Mosquitoes can enter homes through unscreened windows or doors, or broken screens.

- Make sure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace all screens in your home that have tears or holes.
- Remove all discarded tires from your property.
- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots, or similar water-holding containers.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly. Clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs. If not in use, keep empty and covered.
- Drain water from pool covers.
- Change the water in bird baths at least once a week.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Eliminate any standing water that collects on your property.
- Remind or help neighbors to eliminate breeding sites on their properties.

## **What can I do to reduce my risk of becoming infected with West Nile virus?**

From April to October, when mosquitoes are most active, take the following precautions:

- If outside during evening, nighttime and dawn hours when mosquitoes are most active and likely to bite, children and adults should wear protective clothing such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks.
- If outside during evening, nighttime and dawn hours, consider the use of an insect repellent containing 10% or less DEET (N, N-diethyl-methyl-meta-toluamide) for children and no more than 30% DEET for adults.
- Use DEET according to manufacturer's directions:
  - Do not use DEET on infants or pregnant women.
  - Do not allow young children to apply DEET themselves.
  - Do not apply DEET directly to children. Apply to your own hands and then put it on the child.
  - DEET is effective for approximately four hours. Avoid prolonged or excessive use of DEET. Use sparingly to cover exposed skin and clothing.
  - Wash all treated skin and clothing after returning indoors.
  - Store DEET out of reach of children.

- Vitamin B, ultrasonic devices, incense and bug zappers have not been shown to be effective in preventing mosquito bites.

## **What is West Nile virus?**

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

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