



Community Health Connections

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Fact Sheet

West Nile Virus (WNV)

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

The WNV is a potentially serious illness. It is established as a seasonal epidemic in North America. It flares in the summer and can continue into the fall.

How is the WNV spread?

West Nile Virus is usually spread by a bite from an infected mosquito. The mosquito becomes infected when it feeds on an infected bird. When a mosquito is infected, it can potentially infect humans and other animals that it may bite. Much less frequently persons can become infected via contact with infected animals, their blood, or other tissues.

What are the symptoms of WNV?

Most people who are bitten by a mosquito that is infected with WNV show no symptoms at all. This accounts for about 80 percent of people who are infected. Up to 20 percent of infected people have mild symptoms. The symptoms can be fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, back, or stomach. These symptoms can last for a few days, but sometimes people who are normally healthy have become sick for several weeks. Serious symptoms occur in a small number of people, about 1 in 150. These people will have severe symptoms that can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness, and paralysis. These symptoms may last weeks, and the neurological effects may be permanent. If you are going to become ill from the WNV, symptoms develop 3 to 14 days after the bite.

What is the risk of becoming sick from WNV?

People over 50 are at higher risk to get severe illness. At this time it is unknown if persons with an immunocompromised system are at higher risk.

Being outside can also put you at higher risk; be mindful of preventing and avoiding mosquito bites.

What is the treatment?

At this time there is no specific treatment for WNV. Milder cases may resolve without any intervention. Persons with severe cases may need hospitalization, medical and nursing care.

What is the prevention?

The easiest way to prevent WNV is to avoid mosquito bites. When outside, use insect repellent containing an EPA – registered active ingredient. Avoid times when mosquitoes are most active, from dusk to dawn. Stay inside or wear long sleeves and pants. Be sure to keep mosquitoes out of your homes; have good screens on windows and doors. Be mindful of mosquito breeding sites. Empty standing water from flower pots, buckets, or barrels. Frequently change water in pet bowls and bird baths.

What to do if I think I have WNV?

Seek medical attention if you or someone you care for develops severe signs of WNV. If you think you have milder signs of WNV, you may not need to seek medical attention unless you choose to do so.