

West Nile Virus Fact Sheet

What is West Nile Virus (WNV) infection?

West Nile Virus infection is one that is spread by the bite of infected mosquitoes. It is named after the West Nile district of Uganda in Africa where the virus was first isolated in 1937.

How do people get infected with WNV?

People get WNV from the bite of infected mosquitoes. A mosquito is infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. WNV is not spread by person-to-person contact, or directly from birds to humans.

I've gotten a mosquito bite. Should I be tested for WNV infection?

No, most mosquitoes are not infected with WNV. See a physician if you develop the symptoms below.

What are the symptoms of WNV?

Most people who are infected have no symptoms or may experience mild illness such as fever and headache before fully recovering. In some individuals, particularly the elderly, WNV can cause serious disease that affects the central nervous system. At its most serious, it can cause permanent brain damage and death. Symptoms generally occur 5-15 days following the bite of an infected mosquito, and range from a slight fever, headache, rash, and swollen glands to the rapid onset of severe headache, high fever, stiff neck, disorientation, muscle weakness, coma and death.

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 die.

Where has WNV been found and where is it going?

WNV 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. Since then, it has spread west across the country. It was first detected in horses in New Mexico in August 2002 and as of August 2003 had spread to 20 counties in the state.

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.

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. Use insect repellent products with no more than 35 percent DEET for adults and less than 10 percent for children.
4. If you leave your house windows open, make sure they have screens.
5. Do not allow water to stagnate in old tires, flowerpots, trash containers, swimming pools, bird baths, pet bowls, etc.