

# The Facts:

## What is West Nile Virus?

The West Nile Virus is a virus that is carried by birds and transmitted to humans and mammals by mosquitoes. West Nile Virus first appeared in the United States in 1999. It first appeared in Georgia in 2001 which resulted in 1 death.

## How do people become infected with West Nile Virus?

People can become infected by a bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes are infected when they feed on a bird infected with the virus. When an infected mosquito bites a person, the virus is injected into the person and may cause illness. West Nile Virus is not spread from person to person or animal to person.

## How common is West Nile Virus in Fulton County, Georgia?

There have been documented cases of human illness caused by West Nile Virus in Fulton County. The virus has also been detected in animals, birds and mosquitoes.

## Why does Fulton County pick-up dead birds?

Testing fresh dead birds allows Fulton County to track West Nile Virus activity. For surveillance purposes, Fulton County arranges for the testing of fresh dead crows, raptors and blue jays. So please report all dead birds. Remember West Nile Virus is transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito, and not from handling live or dead birds. You should always wear gloves whenever handling a dead animal, including birds.

## What are the signs and symptoms of West Nile Virus?

Most people that become infected will have no symptoms. Some individuals may develop mild illness such as fever, headache, body aches, skin rash, and swollen lymph glands. Symptoms usually occur 5 to 15 days after being infected. In rare cases, encephalitis or swelling of the brain may occur. Symptoms of encephalitis include intense headache, rapid onset of high fever, a stiff neck,

disorientation and muscle weakness. If you have any or all of these symptoms please call your physician.

## Who is at greatest risk of becoming ill from West Nile Virus?

Individuals over the age of 50 are more at risk of developing severe symptoms due to their weakening immune systems. Infants may also be at greater risk.

## How is West Nile Virus infection treated?

There is no standard treatment, medication or cure for West Nile Virus. However, there are treatments for specific symptoms caused by the virus.

## If a mosquito bites me, will I get sick?

Most mosquitoes are not infected with the West Nile Virus. Even if an infected mosquito bites you, your chances of getting sick are low. However, you should see your doctor immediately if you develop symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, or severe headache.

## What can I do to protect myself from West Nile Virus infection?

You can begin by taking steps to reduce mosquito breeding areas near your home and by preventing mosquito bites. Mosquitoes MUST have water in order to reproduce.

## What can I do to keep mosquitoes from biting?

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when you are outdoors.
- Limit the amount of time you spend outdoors between dusk and dawn, or at other times when mosquitoes are active.
- Use insect repellent that contains DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide). Be sure to carefully follow the directions on the label. DEET can be harmful if misused. It should be applied sparingly, to clothing and exposed areas of the skin. It should not be applied to a child's face or hands, or to skin that is scratched or irritated. Use DEET repellents with concentrates of 10 percent or less for children and below 30 percent for adults. DO NOT use DEET on

infants. DO NOT use DEET on children under age 3 or in concentrations greater than listed above, without first consulting your physician. Cream, lotion or stick formulas are best for applying to areas of exposed skin. Wash skin where DEET was applied when mosquito exposure has ended. If you have any questions about the use of DEET contact the manufacturer.

- As with chemical exposures in general, pregnant women should take care to avoid exposure to DEET whenever practical.
- Do not allow children to handle mosquito repellent.
- Take special care to cover up the arms and legs of children playing outdoors.
- Cover baby carriages or outdoor playpens with mosquito netting.
- Fix any holes in your screens and make sure they are tightly attached to your doors and windows.

