

WEST NILE VIRUS

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus is an illness that is contracted by mosquitoes when they bite infected birds. The virus can spread from infected mosquitoes to humans, birds and other mammals like horses.

Who is at risk?

Everyone who is active or outside during the summer months is at risk of encountering West Nile virus. Those with weaker immune systems, including those over 40 years of age and individuals who suffer from chronic diseases may be at greater risk for serious health implications.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may range from mild illness such as “West Nile Fever”, to serious neurological illness such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). Research shows that four out of five people who are bitten by an infected mosquito do not show any symptoms of the virus at all. Other common symptoms include:

- Fever
- Muscle weakness
- Stiff neck
- Confusion
- Severe headache
- Sensitivity to light
- Extreme swelling or infection at the site of the mosquito bite

Even though the majority of people with mild flu-like symptoms may not need blood tests for West Nile, you should consult your doctor if you have the above symptoms. Overall, most doctors believe that the risk of people becoming seriously ill with West Nile is extremely small. Most with the virus have symptoms that are mild and flu-like. About 20 per cent of those infected may develop West Nile fever - a milder form of the virus that includes fever, headache, muscle aches and a rash that clears up in seven to 10 days.

How can I protect myself from West Nile virus?

Following proper precautions such as using an insect repellent containing DEET as an active ingredient while wearing light colored clothing from head to toe, especially during the hours of dusk to dawn can help reduce the risk of exposure to West Nile virus.

- Look for repellents with no more than 30% DEET for adults
- Neck, wrists and ankles are important areas to apply the repellent to. When applied on clothes, the repellency effect lasts longer.

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**** Provided as general information only. A physician should always be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions.***