

West Nile Virus

General Information

Facts About ...

❑ WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS?

The West Nile virus (WNV) is found in Africa, Eastern Europe, West and Central Asia, the Middle East, and most recently, in North America. The virus can affect humans, horses, birds and other vertebrates. In humans and other animals, the WNV infection has been recognized as a cause of severe and sometimes fatal encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).

In 1999, the WNV made its first appearance in North America when it emerged in the eastern United States and has continued to slowly move west across the United States.

❑ HOW IS WEST NILE VIRUS SPREAD?

The WNV is a mosquito-borne illness. Several species of mosquitoes can carry the virus, although very few mosquitoes actually have the virus. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on birds that carry the virus in their blood. Humans and animals may become infected by the bite of mosquitoes infected with the virus. The WNV has been identified in more than 70 species of birds found dead in the United States. There is no evidence people can get the West Nile virus from handling live or dead infected birds; however, people should avoid bare-handed contact when handling any dead animal.

❑ WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF WEST NILE?

The incubation period in humans for West Nile virus is usually 3 – 15 days.

Mild symptoms include:

- Fever
- Body aches
- Occasionally a skin rash
- Headache
- Swollen glands

Severe symptoms include:

- High fever
- Neck stiffness
- Muscle weakness
- Coma
- Headache
- Disorientation
- Convulsions
- Paralysis

❑ HOW IS WEST NILE PREVENTED?

No WNV vaccine exists for humans at this time. Prevention and control of the virus is most effectively accomplished through surveillance for the WNV, mosquito bite prevention and implementation of appropriate mosquito control measures. Ways to reduce the risk of becoming infected with the WNV may include:

- Stay indoors at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active;
- Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and long pants outdoors;
- Empty water from mosquito breeding sites (i.e., any water-holding container) such as flower pots, pet bowls, buckets, trash cans, swimming pools, rain gutters, discarded tires – any item in which mosquitoes can lay eggs and change water in birdbaths weekly;
- Provide screens for windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of buildings;
- Use mosquito repellent products containing DEET following the manufacturer's recommendations.

❑ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Kitsap County Health District <http://www.wa.gov/kitsaphealth/>
 Washington State Dept. of Health (DoH) <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/zoo/wnv/wnv.html>
 Centers for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dybid/westnile/index.htm>
 West Nile Virus Information Line (DoH) Toll-free (866) 788-4786