

# Fact Sheet: West Nile Virus

## What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito borne disease that can cause illness such as encephalitis and meningitis in humans and some animals. People get WNV when they are bitten by an infected mosquito.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Less than 1% of infected people with WNV will develop severe illness. The symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, and paralysis. WNV can also cause encephalitis or meningitis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent.
- Up to 20 percent of the people who become infected have symptoms such as headaches, fever, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. Symptoms can last for as short as a few days, though even healthy people have become sick for several weeks.
- Approximately 80 percent of people (about 4 out of 5) who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all.

## Treatment

- There is no specific treatment for WNV infection. In cases with milder symptoms, people experience symptoms such as fever and aches that pass on their own
- In more severe cases, people usually need to go to the hospital where they can receive supportive treatment including intravenous fluids, help with breathing and nursing care.

## How is it spread?

- Most often, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can then spread WNV to humans and other animals when they bite.
- In a very small number of cases, WNV also has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and even during pregnancy from mother to baby.
- WNV is **not** spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.

## Prevention

The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites.

- When you are outdoors, use insect repellent containing an EPA-registered active ingredient. Follow the directions on the package and make sure to spray your clothes as mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing.
- Many mosquitoes are most active at dusk and dawn. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants or consider staying indoors during these hours.
- Make sure you have good screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of your home.
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots and buckets.
- Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in birdbaths weekly. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out. Keep children's wading pools empty and on their sides when they are not being used.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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