

West Nile Virus Facts

What is West Nile Encephalitis?

- West Nile encephalitis is a viral disease transmitted to people and horses through the bite of an infected mosquito.
- West Nile virus (WNV) is maintained in a transmission cycle involving one or more species of mosquitoes and birds. Current research is focusing on which mosquitoes and birds are most important in this cycle.
- The virus was first reported in North America during a 1999 outbreak of encephalitis in New York City. WNV had been previously identified in Africa and Europe.
- Since 1999, WNV has moved rapidly across the United States. In 2010, 981 cases, with 45 fatalities, were reported in 40 states.

How serious is it in people?

- Most people infected with WNV will have either no symptoms or a very mild illness. A small percentage of people, especially elderly patients, may develop encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).
- Most of the severe human cases of West Nile encephalitis begin with sudden onset of fever, headache, stiff neck, and vomiting. The illness progresses quickly to include confusion and other mental status changes, in addition to altered reflexes, convulsions, and coma. There is no treatment for this encephalitis other than supportive care until the acute phase of the illness is over.

If I had it before can I get it again?

- Once a person has contracted the virus, evidence suggests that they have some immunity against re-infection, although it may lessen later in life.

How long does the virus remain in a person's body after they are infected?

Most people do not become chronically infected with West Nile virus after being sick. In a very small number of patients, symptoms can persist for some time after the initial infection.

How can it be prevented?

- Personal protection measures such as the use of mosquito repellents containing DEET, avoiding outdoor exposures at dusk and dawn (peak feeding time for many mosquitoes), and wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants will reduce WNV risk.
- Attach and maintain screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of the home.
- Removal of water-holding containers (mosquito breeding sites) from residential areas will reduce numbers of several mosquito species. This includes things like old tires, birdbaths and clogged rain gutters.
- There are equine vaccines available, and they should be administered each spring with the rest of the horse's vaccines.
- Currently there is no West Nile virus vaccine available for humans.

What is the likely future of West Nile virus in Oregon?

- Visit the Oregon Public Health Division website at:
<http://public.health.oregon.gov/DiseasesConditions/DiseasesAZ/Pages/disease.aspx?did=8>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician or veterinarian for specific information related to you or your animals.

For more information:

For more information about West Nile virus, visit:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/q&a.htm>

United States Department of Agriculture:

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahss/equine/wnv/>