

Frequently Asked Questions for West Nile virus

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Information taken from the following webpages:

- CDC West Nile virus: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/wnv_factsheet.htm
- OHA: Diseases and Conditions, West Nile virus
<https://public.health.oregon.gov/DiseasesConditions/DiseasesAZ/WestNileVirus/Pages/wnvprevent.aspx>
- OHA: West Nile Prevention and Education
<https://public.health.oregon.gov/DiseasesConditions/DiseasesAZ/WestNileVirus/Pages/wnvprevent.aspx>

What Is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a potentially serious illness. Experts believe WNV is established as a seasonal epidemic in North America that flares up in the summer and continues into the fall. WNV is carried by mosquitoes and can infect humans, horses, and birds.

How can I get WNV?

Humans can only get the virus from the bite of an infected mosquito. WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.

What are the symptoms of WNV?

Most infections are mild, with fever and flu-like symptoms, but severe infections may cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), and rarely, death.

- **Serious Symptoms in a Few People.** About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent.
- **Milder Symptoms in Some People.** Up to 20 percent of the people who become infected have symptoms such as fever, headache, and 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.
- **No Symptoms in Most People.** Approximately 80 percent of people (about 4 out of 5) who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all.

How Soon Do Infected People Get Sick?

People typically develop symptoms between 3 and 14 days after they are bitten by the infected mosquito.

What Should I Do if I Think I Have WNV?

Milder WNV illness improves on its own, and people do not necessarily need to seek medical attention for this infection though they may choose to do so. If you develop symptoms of severe WNV illness, such as unusually severe headaches or confusion, seek medical attention immediately. Severe WNV illness usually requires hospitalization. Pregnant women and nursing mothers are encouraged to talk to their doctor if they develop symptoms that could be WNV.

How Is WNV Infection Treated?

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, although even healthy people have become sick for several weeks. 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.

What Is the Risk of Getting Sick from WNV?

People over 50, those with high blood pressure or are immunosuppressed are at higher risk to get severe illness. People over the age of 50, those with high blood pressure or are immunosuppressed are more likely to develop serious symptoms of WNV if they do get sick and should take special care to avoid mosquito bites.

Being outside means you're at risk. The more time you're outdoors, the more time you could be bitten by an infected mosquito. Pay attention to avoiding mosquito bites if you spend a lot of time outside, either working or playing.

Risk through medical procedures is very low. All donated blood is checked for WNV before being used. The risk of getting WNV through blood transfusions and organ transplants is very small, and should not prevent people who need surgery from having it. If you have concerns, talk to your doctor.

Pregnancy and nursing do not increase risk of becoming *infected with WNV*.

The risk that WNV may present to a fetus or an infant infected through breastmilk is still being evaluated. Talk with your care provider if you have concerns.

How can I prevent WNV?

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

Mosquito-proof your home by following these steps:

- Eliminate standing water in and around your home and business where mosquitoes can breed.
- At least once or twice a week, empty water from flower pots, pet food and water dishes, birdbaths, swimming pool covers, buckets, barrels, and cans.
- Check for clogged rain gutters and clean them out.
- Remove discarded tires and other items that could collect water.
- Look for containers or trash in places that may be hard to see, such as under bushes or under your home.

Take personal precautions to prevent mosquito bites.

- Apply insect repellent to exposed skin. Generally, the more active ingredients a repellent contains the longer it can protect you from mosquito bites.

- Repellents may irritate the eyes and mouth, so avoid applying repellent to the hands of children.
- Whenever you use an insecticide or insect repellent, be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's DIRECTIONS FOR USE, as printed on the products.
- When weather permits, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors.
- Place mosquito netting over infant carriers when you are outdoors with infants.
- Consider staying indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening, which are peak mosquito biting times.
- Install or repair window and door screens so that mosquitoes cannot get indoors.

There is a dead bird in yard, and I'm concerned that it has West Nile virus. What should I do? If you find a dead bird: Don't handle the body with your bare hands. Contact your local health department for instructions on reporting testing.

My pet bird is sick, and I'm concerned that it has West Nile virus. What should I do? Contact your veterinarian immediately.