

ALERT: West Nile Virus

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Are you ready? Warm weather is here, and so are the mosquitoes. With mosquitoes comes the risk of West Nile virus. In the four years since West Nile virus surfaced in North America, it quickly spread across the United States. With more than 4,000 reported human cases and 284 deaths attributed to the disease in 2002 -- and a wet spring providing an ample breeding ground for mosquitoes -- some health officials predict a heavy West Nile season for 2003.

Spread by Mosquito

Transmission is a vicious circle. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. The virus gets into the mosquito's salivary glands. Then the mosquito bites a human or an animal, injecting the virus, which can multiply and cause illness. Most people who become infected with West Nile virus will have either no symptoms or only mild ones. On rare occasions, West Nile virus infection can result in a severe and sometimes fatal illness known as West Nile encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain). The risk of severe disease is higher for persons 50 years of age and older.

There is no evidence to suggest that West Nile virus can be spread from person to person or from animal to person.

Symptoms

Symptoms vary depending on the severity of the infection.

Mild Infections:

- Flu-like symptoms
- Fever
- Headaches and body aches
- Skin rash
- Swollen lymph glands

Severe Infections Signs:

- Higher fever
- Neck stiffness
- Disorientation
- Coma
- Paralysis
- Convulsions and muscle weakness
- Death

Preventive Measures to Reduce Risk

Reduce your risk with these commonsense approaches:

- Stay indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors
- Spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or DEET
- Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin.
- Install or repair window and door screens so that mosquitoes cannot get indoors
- Limit the number of places available for mosquitos to lay their eggs by eliminating standing water sources from around your home.

Note: Vitamin B and "ultrasonic" devices are NOT effective in preventing mosquito bites

For more details about the disease and its prevention see the following Center for Disease Control web pages:

- Facts and Q&A: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/q&a.htm>
- Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm#prevention>