

# WEST NILE VIRUS

## About West Nile Virus

West Nile is one of a group of disease-causing viruses spread by mosquitoes. West Nile virus (WNV) first appeared in the United States in 1999. Since then it has spread across the United States to California. Health officials expect WNV will be an ongoing health risk during the height of the mosquito season.

## West Nile Virus Symptoms

Most healthy people who become infected with the virus don't have any symptoms at all. Some have only a mild, flu-like illness that includes fever, head ache and body aches, and sometimes a skin rash and swollen lymph glands. These symptoms usually develop within 3 to 14 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Mild symptoms last for a few days and do not appear to cause any long-term health problems.

It is estimated that 1 in 150 persons infected with WNV will develop a more severe form of the disease that can cause inflammation of the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms include high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, convulsions, muscle weakness, coma, and paralysis. This severe form of the disease may last several weeks and some nervous system effects may be permanent. A small number of cases have been fatal. People over 50 years of age have the highest risk of severe disease.

## How the Virus Spreads

Birds are the main carriers of WNV. When a mosquito bites an infected bird, the mosquito can then spread the virus by biting another bird or a human. **West Nile virus is not contagious – there is no evidence it can be spread by direct person to person contact.** There is some evidence that the virus may be spread by blood transfusions, organ donations, and breast milk.

## Treating West Nile Virus

Mild cases respond well to the same kinds of common treatments used for head ache, fever and body aches. The more severe forms of the illness usually require hospitalization. While efforts are being made to create a human vaccine for West Nile virus, no vaccine exists at this time.

## Prevention and Protection

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following three steps to reduce your West Nile virus risk:

### 1. Avoid Mosquito Bites

- Spray – Apply long lasting insect repellent

with the ingredient D.E.E.T. or Picardian according to the label's instructions. Oil of lemon eucalyptus is another alternative that provides protection similar to repellents with low concentrations of D.E.E.T. And don't forget to apply the insect repellent every time you go outside according to the label's instructions.

- Cover up – wear long sleeve shirts, long pants and socks sprayed with repellent while outdoors.
- Avoid mosquitoes – many mosquitoes bite during dusk and dawn. Limit the time outdoors during these hours or be especially sure to use repellents and protective clothing.

### 2. Mosquito-Proof Your Home/Residence

- Fix screens – keep mosquitoes outside by fixing or installing window and door screens.
- Drain standing water – any small amount of standing water can be enough for a mosquito to lay her eggs.
- Look around every week – empty water from buckets, cans, pool covers, flower pots, bird baths and other items. Throw away or cover up stored tires. Clean pet or livestock bowls weekly. Check for clogged rain gutters.

### 3. Help Your Community

- Report dead birds – dead birds can help identify if WNV is present. Call 1-877-WNV-BIRD to report the location of a dead bird – particularly a crow, jay, magpie or raven.
- Identify standing water – encourage your neighbors to empty standing water. Notify the San Benito County Agricultural Commissioner at 831-637-5344 to report neglected pools, ponds or other standing water.

If you have any questions or concerns about West Nile Virus, or you would like more information, please contact the San Benito County Public Health Department at (831) 637-5367.

Informative Web sites include:

[www.westnile.ca.gov](http://www.westnile.ca.gov),  
[www.cdc.gov/westnile](http://www.cdc.gov/westnile)

## Public Health Division

San Benito County Health & Human Services Agency

