

WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV)

FACT SHEET

What is West Nile virus (WNV)?

WNV is a virus most commonly spread to people by mosquito bites. Most people are infected from June through September.

Who can get WNV?

Anyone. However, most people (70–80%) bitten by an infected mosquito do not become infected with the virus and very few people (less than 1%) infected with WNV develop serious illness. People over 60 years of age are at the greatest risk of developing a serious illness from WNV, as well as those with cancer, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease, and organ transplant recipients.

What are the symptoms of WNV?

About one in five people infected with WNV will develop a fever with any of the following symptoms: headaches, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea, or rash. People developing serious neurologic illness (less than 1%) often experience inflammation of the tissue that covers the brain or and spinal cord (known as meningitis). This can result in headaches, high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, seizures, or paralysis.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin 3–14 days after a person is exposed to WNV.

How does WNV spread?

In nature, mosquitoes ingest the virus when biting infected birds. If a mosquito carrying the virus then bites a person they can transmit it to them. The virus is not transmitted by casual contact between people or directly from an animal to a person. In a very small number of cases, WNV has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants,

and from mother to baby during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.

Is there a vaccine for WNV?

No, currently there is no vaccine to protect against WNV.

How is WNV treated?

There is no specific treatment for the virus. Treatment is supportive and based on a patient's clinical condition.

How can a person protect themselves against WNV?

The best way to protect against WNV is to avoid mosquito bites. Take the following steps to avoid mosquito bites:

When spending time outside:

- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved insect repellents
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants
- Treat clothing and gear with permethrin or purchase permethrin-treated items

To mosquito-proof homes:

- Install or repair screens on windows and doors
- Use air conditioning if possible, keeping windows closed
- Remove sources of standing water where mosquitoes might breed, such as flowerpots, gutters, buckets, pool covers, pet water dishes, discarded tires, and birdbaths

Where can I get more information?

Information about WNV and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.doh.dc.gov or email mosquito.info@dc.gov.