FACT SHEET: WEST NILE VIRUS

May 2025

WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne disease endemic in the United States. Transmission typically occurs during mosquito season, which lasts from June to October. While the majority of infected people are asymptomatic, West Nile virus can cause serious, sometimes fatal illness.

WHO CAN GET WEST NILE VIRUS?

Anyone can become infected with West Nile virus. The best way to prevent WNV is by taking steps to avoid mosquito bites, particularly during mosquito season.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF WEST NILE VIRUS?

It is estimated that up to 80% of human West Nile virus infections are asymptomatic. People who develop symptoms, generally within 2-14 days of an exposure, will experience:

- Fever
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Body aches or joint pain
- Gastrointestinal symptoms
- Rash

Less than 1% of infected people will develop neuroinvasive disease, which presents as meningitis, encephalitis, or acute flaccid myelitis. Additional signs of neuroinvasive disease include altered mental status, neck stiffness, seizures, tremor, parkinsonism, or focal neurologic deficits.

HOW IS WEST NILE VIRUS SPREAD?

WNV circulates in the environment between mosquitoes, primarily *Culex* species, and birds. People can become infected when a mosquito feeds on a bird and then bites a human. Rarely, WNV can be transmitted from person-to-person by blood transfusion or organ transplant, and from mother-to-child during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.

IS A PERSON WITH WEST NILE VIRUS CONTAGIOUS?

No, a person infected with West Nile virus is not directly contagious. Rarely, WNV can be transmitted from person-to-person by blood transfusion or organ transplant, and from mother-to-child during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.

HOW IS WEST NILE VIRUS TREATED AND IS THERE A VACCINE?

There is no specific treatment or vaccine for West Nile virus. Clinical management is supportive.

CAN WEST NILE VIRUS BE PREVENTED?

West Nile virus can be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. The following protective measures are effective:

- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved insect repellents
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors
- Sleep under a mosquito net
- Use air conditioning if possible, keeping windows and doors closed
- Install screens on doors and windows
- Treat clothing and gear with permethrin or purchase permethrin-treated items

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Information about West Nile virus and other related health topics can be found at cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit dchealth.dc.gov or call (202) 442-5865.

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