

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



COUNTY MICHIGAN
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

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West Nile Virus

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a commonly found flavivirus. The virus can infect humans, birds, horses and some other mammals. In a small number of people infected by the virus, the disease can be serious, even fatal.

How is West Nile Virus spread?

WNV is most often spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. Horses and other mammals bitten by mosquitoes that carry the virus can also become infected. WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus. Whenever mosquitoes are active there is a risk of getting WNV. The risk is highest from late July through September.

What is the treatment for West Nile Virus?

There is no treatment for WNV infection. Doctors can treat the symptoms of those infected with the virus.

What are the symptoms of West Nile Virus?

Most people (80%) infected with WNV do not have any symptoms. Approximately 20% of people infected have mild symptoms of the disease. Mild symptoms include fever, headache, muscle weakness, and body aches, sometimes with skin rash and swollen lymph glands. Few people (1 in 150) infected with WNV will develop severe symptoms of the disease. Severe symptoms include headache, high fever, stiff neck, confusion, coma, tremors, paralysis and death. People over 50 years of age and those with immune problems or other chronic illnesses are more likely to become seriously ill.

How can West Nile Virus be prevented?

The best way to prevent infection is to minimize your contact with mosquitoes:

- Eliminating standing water that collects in birdbaths, boats, buckets, tires, unused pools, roof gutters and other containers.
- Use insect repellent. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the use of insect repellents containing active ingredients registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Always follow manufacturer's directions carefully, especially when using on children.
- Wearing protective clothing such as long sleeved shirts and pants.
- Limiting outdoor activity primarily between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Avoiding areas where mosquitoes may be present (i.e. shaded and wooded areas).
- Maintaining window and door screening to keep mosquitoes out of buildings.

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For more information on West Nile Virus, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

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