



## Infection Prevention & Control

### Fact Sheet

# WEST NILE VIRUS

(WNL)

### What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a virus that primarily infects birds, although it has been found in other mammals such as horses and bears. Human cases are becoming more common. When humans become infected with the virus, they usually experience mild, flu-like illness that resolves on its own. Occasionally, particularly in the elderly, this develops into encephalitis.



### How is it transmitted?

Infected mosquitoes spread West Nile Virus. There is no person-to-person spread, or animal-to-person spread. There is no evidence of anyone getting WNV from handling infected carcasses, however it is always recommended that gloves be worn to handle any dead bird or animal remains, to prevent acquisition of other types of infection.

### What are the symptoms of West Nile?

Most infections are mild and symptoms include the sudden onset of fever, headache and general body aches, nausea and/or vomiting, occasionally a skin rash on the trunk of the body and swollen lymph glands. These symptoms generally last 3-6 days.

More severe infection may be marked by headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis and, rarely, death. The incubation period for West Nile Virus encephalitis is usually 3-14 days.

The long-term effects of serious cases are not fully understood, but studies to date show that prolonged health problems are possible. These can include physical effects (long-term muscle weakness and paralysis, fatigue, and headache), cognitive effects (confusion, depression, problems with concentration, and memory loss), and/or functional effects (difficulty with preparing meals, going out, shopping).

Although individuals with weaker immune systems are at greater risk for serious health effects, WN virus can cause severe complications for people of any age and health status. This is why it is important to reduce your risk of becoming infected.

### What can I do?

Your chance of being bitten by a mosquito capable of spreading West Nile virus is small. However, if there are reports of infected mosquitoes, infected horses or dead birds in your area, you should take immediate action to minimize your risk of mosquito bites.

- Limit the time you spend outdoors at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear light-colored long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and a hat when outdoors.
- Use insect repellents. Read and follow the manufacturers' directions for safe use.
- Make sure that door and window screens fit tightly and have no holes.

You can also take steps to reduce mosquito populations around your home and property. Mosquitoes need standing pools of water to breed, so remove standing water from such items as pool covers, saucers under flower pots, pet bowls, and wading pools. Empty and clean bird baths twice a week. Also, clean eaves troughs regularly to prevent clogs that can trap water.