



## **What is West Nile Virus?**

- West Nile Virus (WNV) is a virus that can cause disease in people, birds and horses.
- This virus first appeared in North America late in the summer of 1999 in New York City.

## **How does a person get West Nile Virus?**

- WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito.
- In Saskatchewan the main carrier of WNV is the *Culex tarsalis* mosquito which is most active in July, August and early September.
- Mosquitoes become infected by feeding on the blood of birds which carry the virus.
- Wild birds, especially crows, ravens, jays and magpies often die when they are infected.
- WNV can also infect domestic poultry and mammals.
- Spread from animal-to-animal and animal-to-human does not appear to occur.
- Evidence has shown that a pregnant woman can pass WNV to her unborn baby. The virus can also be passed to an infant through breast milk. Rarely, WNV can be spread through blood transfusion.

## **What are the signs and symptoms?**

- Most people infected with WNV have no symptoms or have very mild disease.
- Symptoms can begin 2 to 15 days after the bite of an infected mosquito.
- Mild disease may cause flu-like symptoms: fever, headache, muscle aches, swollen lymph nodes and skin rash.
- Rarely, WNV causes severe disease such as meningitis or encephalitis. Symptoms include severe headache, fever, neck stiffness, muscle weakness, confusion, coma and death.
- Disease is usually more severe in persons with weakened immune systems, chronic diseases and those over 50 years.

## **How is West Nile Virus treated?**

- People who have a sudden onset of severe symptoms should seek medical care immediately.
- Antibiotics are not effective.

## **How is West Nile Virus Prevented?**

- There is no approved human vaccine for WNV.
- Personal protective measures include:
  - Wear light colored, loose fitting clothes with long sleeves and pants when spending time outside
- Apply mosquito repellent that contains DEET or Picaridin 20% (Icaridin) based on age recommendations when you are outdoors, especially at peak biting periods such as dawn and dusk.
- Do not use insect repellants on infants less than 6 months
- Choose 10% DEET or less for children aged 6 months to 12 years.
  - Age 6 months to 2 years: apply once a day avoiding hands and face
  - Age 2 to 12 years: apply no more than 3 times a day avoiding parts of the hands which may have contact with the eyes or mouth
  - Choose up to 30% DEET for 12 years and over
  - Pregnant and nursing mothers consult your physician
- Make sure that window and door screens fit tightly and are free from holes.
- Reduce mosquito populations by:
  - Draining any standing water (such as old tires, wading pools, eaves troughs). Empty and clean bird baths twice a week.
  - Aerating ornamental ponds and stocking fish that eat mosquito larvae.
  - Covering rain barrels with screens. Mesh size should be less than 1.5 mm.
  - Keeping grass cut short.
  - Keeping swimming pool covers free of stagnant water.

### ***For more Information***

- Population and Public Health at **306-655-4612**
- Provincial Health Line at **811**
- Saskatoon Health Region Website:  
[https://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/locations\\_services/Services/communicable-diseases/Pages/West-Nile-Virus-Surveillance.aspx](https://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/locations_services/Services/communicable-diseases/Pages/West-Nile-Virus-Surveillance.aspx)
- Ministry of Health website: <http://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/diseases-and-conditions/west-nile-virus>