

West Nile Virus: Reduce Your Risk

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile Virus was first discovered in the West Nile area of Uganda in 1937. It is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause mild or serious illness. Infection may result in no symptoms, to mild illness similar to flu symptoms, to serious neurological illness as a result of inflammation of the spinal cord and brain (encephalitis). West Nile virus can only be spread to humans and animals through the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected after feeding on blood from an infected bird. The virus cannot be spread by person-to-person contact or from a bird to a human.

Am I at risk?

Very few mosquitoes are infected with West Nile virus, however, everyone should be diligent in trying to avoid catching it. Did you know that if you have chronic illnesses or are older than 50, you have an increased chance of becoming sick if infected? Also, children under the age of five and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of developing a more serious illness.



Are my pets safe?

West Nile virus has been known to infect cats, bats, horses, domestic rabbits and other small animals. You may wish to consult a veterinarian if your pet displays any unusual symptoms or behaviour. You should rest assured that a full recovery from the infection is likely. Pet owners should also note that there is no evidence of animal-to-person transmission of West Nile virus.



Is there a cure for West Nile virus?

There is no vaccine or cure for West Nile virus, so the best protection against it is prevention.

What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?

Most infected people experience only mild symptoms or none at all. Mild, flu-like symptoms usually occur within the first three to 15 days of being bitten by an infected mosquito. Few people experience more severe symptoms.

Mild signs and symptoms include:

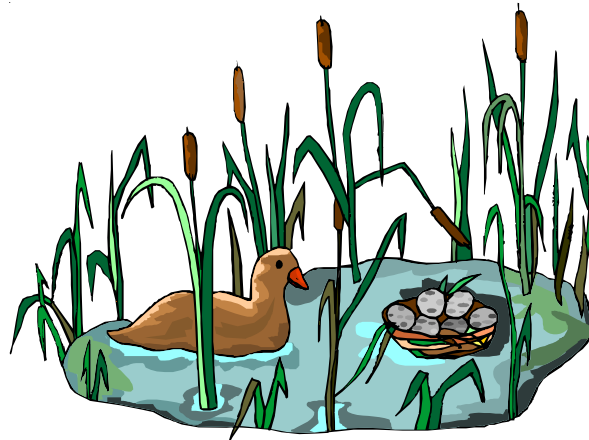
- Fever
- Muscle weakness
- Sudden sensitivity to light
- Severe Headache
- Disorientation
- Neck stiffness

Severe signs and symptoms include:

- High fever
- Coma
- Convulsions
- Death
- Stupor
- Tremors
- Paralysis
- Confusion

When should I seek medical help?

Seek medical help if you experience the severe signs and symptoms listed above.



KEEP YOURSELF PROTECTED!

The best way to avoid becoming infected with West Nile virus is to prevent mosquito bites and eliminate mosquito breeding areas.

Personal protection during mosquito season (May to September):

- ✓ Stay indoors at dawn, dusk and early evening when the mosquitoes are most active;
- ✓ Wear long pants, long sleeved shirts, shoes and socks when possible;
- ✓ Wear light coloured, thick clothing to reduce mosquito attraction and limit bites; and
- ✓ Consider applying insect repellent to skin when at risk of mosquito contact. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions carefully.

To prevent breeding areas:

- ✓ don't let any outside water stand still for more than five days; either eliminate it or flush it with a hose;
- ✓ eliminate standing water areas, such as pool covers, ceramic pots and bird baths. These areas should be emptied and cleaned twice weekly;
- ✓ clean roof gutters and eavestroughs regularly, so water doesn't accumulate;
- ✓ ensure that rainwater barrels are tightly sealed or covered with a mesh screen;
- ✓ discard old tires; and
- ✓ turn over wheelbarrows and plastic wading pools when not in use.

