

West Nile Virus

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus is a disease transmitted to people through the bite of an infected *Culex tarsalis* mosquito.

Most people infected with West Nile virus will not have any symptoms or may have flu-like symptoms. About 2 in 10 people bitten by an infected mosquito will notice symptoms 2 to 6 days after the bite.

Who is at Risk for West Nile Virus?

People who spend a lot of time outdoors are at greater risk of being bitten by an infected mosquito compared to people who stay indoors.

The risk of severe illness and death is highest for people older than age 60 and for people with some medical conditions such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease or people who have had organ transplants.

How is the West Nile Virus Spread?

West Nile virus has spread throughout North America by infected birds. Mosquitoes feed on the infected birds and become infected. They spread the virus when they bite people.

In a small number of cases, the virus has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and during pregnancy from mother to baby. These cases are rare. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your health care provider.

What are the Symptoms of West Nile Virus?

Symptoms can include:

- sudden high fever
- severe headache
- muscle aches, backache, weakness
- joint pain
- nausea (feel like throwing up)
- vomiting (throwing up)
- sore throat
- swollen lymph nodes
- fatigue (feeling very tired)
- rash.

Severe symptoms of encephalitis or meningitis (swelling of the brain or nearby tissues) can include:

- changes in how you think
- vomiting
- sensitive to light
- changes in your reflexes
- seizures
- paralysis (rare).

What are the Side Effects of West Nile Virus?

Some effects of West Nile virus can last for several weeks or never go away. These include fatigue and weakness, among others.

How is West Nile Virus Found?

Your health care provider will look at your symptoms. They may want to give you a blood test or other tests based on your symptoms. If your symptoms are severe, you may need to stay in the hospital.

How is West Nile Virus Treated?

There is no medicine to treat the West Nile virus. Treatment is based on your symptoms:

- Mild symptoms will go away on their own.
- More severe symptoms may need to be treated in the hospital.

Your health care provider will talk with you about your options.

How Can You Avoid West Nile Virus?

To reduce your risk of getting West Nile virus, protect yourself against mosquito bites.

- Use insect repellents when you go outside. Use only products that are registered by the Environmental Protection Agency. Follow the label directions.
 - DEET (up to 30%)
 - picaridin
 - IR3535
 - some oil of lemon eucalyptus and products
 - permethrin repellents for your clothing or gear.

- Wear light-colored long-sleeve shirts, long pants and socks when you are outdoors.
- Take extra care if you are outside between dusk to dawn. This is peak mosquito feeding time.
- Mosquitoes that carry disease lay their eggs in containers that hold water. Help reduce places mosquitoes can breed by emptying standing water from:
 - gutters
 - flowerpots
 - bird baths
 - pet water or food dishes
 - old tires (including tire swings)
 - buckets
 - pool covers (above ground and in-ground).
- Keep mosquitoes out of your house. Fix any windows, screens or doors that may let insects inside. Use air conditioning when you can.

How Long Should Infected People Stay Home From Work or School?

Your recovery will depend on how severe your infection is. Your health care provider will give you guidelines about work or school.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Minnesota Department of Health.