

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne disease that can cause encephalitis or brain infection. Mosquitoes spread this virus after they feed on infected birds and then bite people, other birds, or animals. WNV is not spread by person-to-person contact and there is no evidence that people can get the virus by handling infected animals.

WNV Susceptibility

Who's at risk?

In 2003, over 9,500 people in the United States became ill from WNV infection and over 250 people died. Anyone from infants to the elderly can get WNV; however, people over 50 years of age have the highest risk of developing West Nile fever or West Nile encephalitis. People with compromised immune systems (for example, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and other illnesses) are also at increased risk.

How can I get West Nile virus?

The main route of human infection is through the bite of an infected mosquito. In 2002, additional routes became apparent; however, this represented a very small proportion of cases. These routes include receiving transplanted organs and blood transfusions, transplacental (mother to unborn child) and possibly breastfeeding transmission, and laboratory workers working with West Nile infected products.

How to Protect Yourself

Steps you can take to minimize the chance for infection include remembering the 5 D's of West Nile virus prevention:

Dawn and Dusk- When possible, avoid spending time outside at dawn and dusk. Dawn and dusk are times that mosquitoes are most active.

Dress- Wear shoes, socks, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors for long periods of time or when mosquitoes are most active (dawn and dusk). Clothing should be light colored and made of tightly woven materials to keep mosquitoes away from the skin.

DEET- For additional protection from mosquitoes, use an insect repellent containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide). Spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or DEET because mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing. Products containing DEET must be used properly according to the directions on the product label.

Drain- Drain standing water and containers that collect water on or near your property. Mosquitoes may lay eggs in areas with standing water.

Birds & Horses

Birds and horses typically become infected with West Nile virus (WNV) before humans, so dead birds and sick and dead horses are an indicator of WNV activity. The Wyoming Department of Health and other state and local agencies use animal surveillance to map the distribution and prevalence of WNV so that health and mosquito control officials are aware of its presence and can take measures to alleviate the impact of WNV on human and equine populations.

