



Middlesex County Office of Public Health



FACT SHEET



West Nile Virus

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

WNV is a mosquito-borne virus which is transmitted to people through the bite of an infected mosquito.

What is the basic transmission cycle of WNV?

Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds, which may circulate the virus in their blood for a few days. After a short incubation period, the infected mosquito can then transmit WNV to humans and animals when biting to take blood. There have been isolated cases of WNV transmitted through breast milk, or blood products, however the main route of infection is through a bite of an infected mosquito.

Can you get West Nile Virus from birds?

There is no evidence that a person can get West Nile Virus from infected live or dead birds. However, you should avoid direct skin contact with any dead animals, including birds, and use gloves or plastic bags when handling.

Can you get West Nile Virus from another person?

WNV is NOT transmitted from person-to-person. You can't get West Nile virus from touching or kissing a person who has the disease or from a health care worker who has treated someone with the disease.

What are the symptoms of West Nile Virus?

Most West Nile Virus infections are mild and symptoms may include fever, headache, body aches, skin rashes and swollen glands. Some people infected with the disease will show no symptoms. More severe cases will be characterized by headache, high fever, stiff neck, disorientation, muscle weakness, paralysis and, rarely, death. People over the age of 50 and those with weakened immune systems are at a higher risk for serious disease.

How is WNV treated?

There is no specific treatment for WNV, however, most people recover within two weeks. In more severe infections, intensive supportive therapy may be required.

Is there a vaccine to protect humans against West Nile Virus?

Currently, there is no vaccine, however several companies are conducting research on developing a vaccine for West Nile Virus.

What if I find a dead bird on my property?

Contact your local health department within 24 hours. There is no evidence that a person can get the virus from an infected bird.

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Fact Sheet

West Nile Virus Prevention

What Can I Do to Prevent WNV?

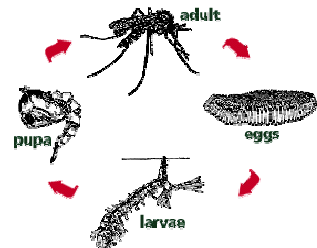
- The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites.
- When you are outdoors, use insect repellent containing an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered active ingredient. Follow the directions on the package.
- Many mosquitoes are most active at dusk and dawn. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants at these times or consider staying indoors during these hours.
- Maintain screening to exclude mosquitoes from your house.

EPA recommends the following precautions when using insect repellents:

- Apply repellents only to exposed skin and/or clothing (as directed on the product label.) Do not use repellents under clothing.
 - Never use repellents over cuts, wounds or irritated skin.
 - Do not apply to eyes or mouth, and apply sparingly around ears. When using sprays, do not spray directly on face—spray on hands first and then apply to face.
 - Do not allow children to handle the product. When using on children, apply to your own hands first and then put it on the child. You may not want to apply to children's hands.
 - Use just enough repellent to cover exposed skin and/or clothing. Heavy application and saturation are generally unnecessary for effectiveness. If biting insects do not respond to a thin film of repellent, then apply a bit more.
 - After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water or bathe. This is particularly important when repellents are used repeatedly in a day or on consecutive days. Also, wash treated clothing before wearing it again. (This precaution may vary with different repellents—check the product label.)
- If you or your child gets a rash or other bad reaction from an insect repellent, stop using the repellent, wash the repellent off with mild soap and water, and call a local poison control center for further guidance. If you go to a doctor because of the repellent, take the repellent with you to show the doctor.

Prevent Mosquito breeding sites:

- Eliminate standing water on your property by disposing of empty cans, buckets, old tires, trash cans, etc. Those you want to save, turn upside down frequently or punch holes in the bottom so water drains out.
- Change water in bird baths at least once a week.
- Clean clogged roof gutters.
- Empty plastic pools when not in use.
- Stock ornamental ponds with fish that eat mosquitoes.



Mosquito Life Cycle

Additional Resources:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>
www.state.nj.us/health/cd/westnile/enceph.htm
<http://co.middlesex.nj.us/mosquito/westnile.asp>



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