

## West Nile Virus General Information

### ***What is West Nile virus?***

West Nile virus is a virus that lives in some birds and may be transmitted to people by mosquitoes. The virus can cause a broad variety of symptoms including encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord); encephalitis and meningitis can be caused too by head injury, bacterial infections or most commonly other viral infections.

### ***How do people get the virus?***

West Nile virus is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. Biting a bird that carries the virus infects a mosquito. You or your child cannot get West Nile virus from a person who has the disease. West Nile virus is not spread by person-to-person contact such as touching, kissing, or caring for someone who is infected.

### ***Can you get West Nile virus directly from birds?***

West Nile virus cannot spread directly from birds to people. However, dead birds should not be handled with bare hands. Use gloves to carefully place dead birds in a double plastic bag and then place the dead birds in the outdoor trash.

### ***Besides mosquitoes, can you get West Nile virus directly from other insects or ticks?***

Infected mosquitoes are the primary source for West Nile virus transmission to humans. There is no information to suggest that ticks transmitted West Nile virus to patients in the New York City area outbreak.

### ***Do birds naturally infected with the virus die or become ill?***

In the 1999 outbreak and with the current information for year 2000, large numbers of North American crows were observed becoming seriously ill and dying. Other species, such as chickens or exotic species at zoos, can get the infection but usually don't die because of it.

### ***Can other animals get sick?***

Last year in New York City, sick and dead cats, crows and horses were laboratory confirmed as being infected with the virus. In addition, dogs, chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys and many other species of wild and domestic birds, while

not clinically ill tested positive for West Nile virus antibodies, thereby, demonstrating they had been infected.

### ***Where did the West Nile virus come from?***

Outbreaks of the West Nile virus have occurred before in Egypt, Asia, Israel, South Africa, parts of Europe and Australia. Before 1999, the West Nile virus had never before been found in the United States. Plausible explanations are that an imported infected bird or an infected human returning from a country where the virus is common introduced the virus.

### ***Where has the virus been found?***

In 1999 laboratory confirmed West Nile virus in mosquitoes or birds was reported in New Jersey, New York and Maryland (Baltimore). In the year 2000, reports of infected mosquitoes have been received from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut; infected birds have been reported from the same states plus Massachusetts.

### ***What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?***

Most people who get infected with West Nile virus have no symptoms at all; some can experience mild illness such as a fever, headache and body aches before fully recovering. In outbreaks in other parts of the world, some persons also developed mild rash or swollen lymph glands. In some individuals, particularly the elderly, West Nile virus can cause serious disease that affects brain tissue. At its most serious, it can cause permanent neurological damage and can be fatal. Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) symptoms include the rapid onset of severe headache, high fever, stiff neck, confusion, loss of consciousness (coma), and muscle weakness. Death may result in some cases.

### ***Is a woman's pregnancy at risk if she becomes infected with West Nile Virus?***

There is no documented evidence that a pregnant woman or the fetus are at increased risk due to infection with West Nile virus.

producers if they are allowed to stagnate

- Turn over wheelbarrows and change water in bird baths at least twice weekly. Both provide breeding habitat for domestic mosquitoes
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Eliminate any standing water that collects on your property. Use landscaping as needed. Mosquitoes will develop in any puddle that last more than 4 days.
- Remind or help neighbors to eliminate breeding sites on their properties.

**Please Note:** Some local hardware stores may carry a product called Mosquito Dunk that contains a larvicide - *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis (BTI)* - for use in areas of standing water around the home. The State recommends eliminating standing water around the home to reduce breeding sites for mosquitoes and warns that direct handling of larvicides may cause skin and eye irritation. If these products are purchased for home use, we recommend careful reading of the hazards label, directions, and details regarding storage and handling.

### ***What is the State doing to address the possible presence of West Nile virus?***

Although the west Nile Virus has not been found here there is a real chance that it will spread into the State. In response to this risk the New Hampshire Department of Health, along with other City, State and federal agencies, has developed a plan to find and control the kind of mosquitoes known to carry the virus and in general to assess the presence of West Nile virus in New Hampshire. This plan includes trapping and testing mosquitoes in selected areas throughout the state, testing dead birds (crows) and other animals, and human surveillance.

### ***What health risks are posed to people and pets from pesticides?***

If pesticides are used, the products that will be applied will be used according to guidelines set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In the small amounts used, these pesticides would pose negligible risks to people and to pets. Residents will learn about spraying schedules through public service announcements, the media, the DHHS /DES website, and a telephone information line.

### ***Should I report dead birds?***

The Department of Agriculture is taking reports on dead bird sightings within New Hampshire, especially crows. While the Departments of Agriculture and the Department Health are interested in collecting information about dead birds as part of their efforts to understand West Nile virus, we will not be picking up *every* dead bird reported. The Department will only be collecting a small sample of the bird population. However, we encourage New Hampshire residents to report all dead crow sightings to assist the department's monitoring efforts.

If you do not receive a phone call from the Department of Agriculture to arrange pick up of the dead bird within 24 hours of making the report or by the next business day, please dispose of the dead bird. West Nile virus cannot spread directly from birds to people, however dead birds should not be handled with bare hands. **Use gloves to carefully place dead birds in a double plastic bag and then place the dead birds in the outdoor trash.**

***For more information about West Nile virus, call the New Hampshire Department of Health, Bureau Of Communicable Disease Control, at (800) 852 - 3345, extension 4496.***

***For bird report please contact the Department of Agriculture at 271 - 2404.***

### ***How are West Nile infection and West Nile encephalitis treated?***

There are no specific therapies. In more severe cases, intensive supportive therapy is indicated, i.e., hospitalization, intravenous (IV) fluids and nutrition, airway management, ventilatory support (ventilator) if needed, prevention of secondary infections (pneumonia, urinary tract, etc.), and good nursing care.

### ***Is there a vaccine against West Nile virus?***

No.

### ***How long does it take to get sick if bitten by an infected mosquito?***

Being bitten by an infected mosquito will not necessarily make you sick since most people who are infected with West Nile virus have no symptoms or experience mild illness. If illness were to occur, it would occur within 5 to 15 days of being bitten by an infected mosquito.

### ***I've gotten a mosquito bite. Should I be tested for West Nile virus?***

No. Even in areas where West Nile Virus has been detected most mosquitoes are not infected, and currently in New Hampshire their presence has not been reported. Illnesses related to mosquito bites are rare, especially in New Hampshire. However, you should see a doctor immediately if you develop symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, severe headaches, stiff neck, or if your eyes become sensitive to light. Patients with mild symptoms should recover completely, and do not require any specific medication or laboratory testing.

### ***What should a person do if he/she thinks they have West Nile encephalitis?***

If a person has signs of encephalitis, with fever, muscle weakness, and confusion, he or she should seek medical care as soon as possible.

### ***Who is at risk for getting West Nile encephalitis after being bitten by an infected mosquito?***

Persons older than 50 years of age have the highest risk of severe disease.

### ***What can I do to reduce my risk of becoming infected with West Nile virus?***

From April to October, when mosquitoes are most active, take the following precautions:

- If outside during evening, nighttime and dawn hours when mosquitoes are most active and likely to bite, children and adults should wear protective clothing such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks.

- If outside during evening, nighttime and dawn hours, consider the use of an insect repellent containing 10% or less DEET (N, N-diethyl-methyl-meta-toluamide) for children and no more than 30% DEET for adults.

### ***Use DEET according to manufacturer's directions:***

- Do not use DEET on infants or pregnant women.
- Do not allow young children to apply DEET themselves.
- Do not apply DEET directly to children. Apply to your own hands and then put it on the child.
- DEET is effective for approximately four hours. Avoid prolonged or excessive use of DEET. Use sparingly to cover exposed skin and clothing.
- Wash all treated skin and clothing after returning indoors.
- Store DEET out of reach of children.
- Vitamin B, ultrasonic devices, incense and bug zappers have not been shown to be effective in preventing mosquito bites.

### ***What is the State doing to address the possible presence of West Nile virus?***

The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, along with other City, State and federal agencies, has developed a plan to assess for the presence of West Nile virus and to find and control the kind of mosquitoes known to carry the virus. This plan includes trapping and testing mosquitoes in selected areas throughout the state, testing dead birds (crows) and other animals, and human surveillance.

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***For more information about West Nile virus, call the NH Department of Health and Human Services, West Nile Virus Information Line at 1-866-273-6453.***