

There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus-related diseases. In more severe cases, intensive supportive therapy is indicated, often involving hospitalization, intravenous fluids, airway management, respiratory support (ventilator), prevention of secondary infections (pneumonia, urinary tract, etc.), and good nursing care.

Symptoms of mild disease will generally last a few days. Symptoms of severe disease may last several weeks, although neurological effects may be permanent.

The question on people's mind's are what can be done to prevent possible infection or subdue the spread of the West Nile virus. Since the spread of the disease is mainly through mosquitos, here are some preventive measures that can be taken;

- Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. The more DEET ingredient that a repellent contains, the longer it can protect you from mosquito bites. A higher percentage of DEET in a repellent does not mean that your protection is better—just that it will last longer. DEET concentrations higher than 50% do not increase the length of protection.
- Choose a repellent that provides protection for the amount of time that you will be outdoors.
- Repellents may irritate the eyes and mouth, so avoid applying repellent to the hands of children.
- Spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or DEET since mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing. Do not apply repellents containing permethrin directly to exposed skin. If you spray your clothing, there is no need to spray repellent containing DEET on the skin under your clothing.
- When possible, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors. Place mosquito netting over infant carriers when you are outdoors with infants.
- Consider staying indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening, which are peak mosquito biting times.
- Install, or repair, window and door screens so that mosquitoes cannot get indoors.

Help reduce the number of mosquitoes in areas outdoors where you work or play, by draining sources of standing water. In this way, you reduce the number of places mosquitoes can lay their eggs and breed. At least once or twice a week, empty water from flower pots, pet food and water dishes, birdbaths, swimming pool covers, buckets, barrels, and cans. Check for clogged rain gutters and clean them out. Remove discarded tires, and other items that could collect water. Be sure to check for containers or trash in places that may be hard to see, such as under bushes or under your home.

Currently, there is no vaccine available for the West Nile virus.

Adam Grayson / Allstate Resource Management

For additional or updated information on the West Nile Virus, please visit the Center for Disease Control (CDC) at www.cdc.gov.

THE FACTS ABOUT "WEST NILE VIRUS"

With all the media hype today, it is no wonder that the West Nile Virus is on the tip of everyone's tongue. The West Nile Virus, also known as West Nile fever and West Nile encephalitis, is a flavivirus that originates from West Asia, Africa and the parts of the Middle East. The term West Nile virus covers a few different types of infection, in which the specific classification depends on the severity of the case. The "West Nile fever" is the mild form of the disease and is characterized by flu-like symptoms, including fever, headache, body aches, and swollen lymph glands. West Nile fever typically lasts only a few days and does not appear to cause any long-term health effects.

The more severe forms of the disease are termed "West Nile encephalitis", "West Nile meningitis" or "West Nile meningoencephalitis". Encephalitis refers to an inflammation of the brain. Meningitis is an inflammation of the membrane around the brain and the spinal cord. Meningoencephalitis refers to inflammation of the brain and the membrane surrounding it. The symptoms of a severe infection include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis.

According to the Center for Disease Control, even if you live in an area where birds or mosquitoes infected with West Nile virus have been reported, people are not likely to get sick. In the areas where the virus is present, very few mosquitoes are carriers. Even if a person is bitten by an infected mosquito, less than 1% of the people who get bitten and become infected will get severely ill. The overall chances of becoming radically ill from any one mosquito bite is extremely small. Most people who are infected with the West Nile virus will not suffer any type of illness or effects. Approximately 20% of the people who become infected will develop West Nile fever: It is estimated that only 1 in 150 persons infected with the virus will develop a severe form of the disease. Symptoms of the virus are usually present within a 3 to 14 day period. Among those with severe illness, case-fatality rates range from 3% to 15% and are highest among the elderly. Less than 1% of persons infected with West Nile virus will develop severe illness.

The West Nile virus is primarily an avian disease, but has been found in a wide number of mammals. Included in this group are horses, cats, bats, chipmunks, skunks, squirrels, and domestic rabbits. Many people want to know if the disease is transmitted through direct contact of either live or dead animals that are infected. To date, there have not been any cases that suggest this is a cause. It should be noted that bare-handed contact with *any* dead animals should be avoided and the use of gloves or double plastic bags to handle or place the carcass in a garbage can is highly recommended.

Animals are not the only warm-blooded creatures who are at risk of getting the West Nile virus. People who live in areas where the disease is now found are at risk of getting the virus. People over the age of 50 run the highest risk of having a severe infection. From what is known, there is no evidence that suggests a clear link between the level of a person's overall health and their risk of getting severe disease.

While originating from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, the West Nile virus is thought to be permanently established in the United States. Florida residents have the dubious honor of living in a southern climate, where the West Nile virus can be transmitted all year round.

Humans can become infected with the virus through the bite of an infected mosquito, or it is now known to be transmitted through blood transfusions. The mosquitos receive the disease when they feed on birds that are carriers, which may circulate the virus in their blood for a few days. Infected mosquitoes can then transmit West Nile virus to humans and animals while biting to take blood. The virus is located in the mosquito's salivary glands. During blood feeding, the virus may be injected into the animal or human, where it may multiply, possibly causing illness.