

WEST NILE VIRUS

Senior Citizens

West Nile virus, a mosquito-borne infection that can cause serious illness, and in some cases, death, was first found in New York State in 1999. While the chances of anyone becoming ill are small, persons over age 50 are at higher risk for serious illness.

Most people who are infected with West Nile virus will not have symptoms. It is estimated that 20% of the people who become infected will develop West Nile fever with mild symptoms, including fever, headache and body aches, occasionally with a skin rash on the trunk of the body and swollen lymph glands. In many individuals, these symptoms are so mild that they go unnoticed or undetected.

The symptoms of severe infection (West Nile encephalitis or meningitis) include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, muscle weakness, stupor, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, paralysis, and coma. It is estimated that one in 150 persons infected with the West Nile virus will develop a more severe form of the disease.

Symptoms usually occur three to fourteen days after exposure. There is no specific treatment for viral infections, other than to treat the symptoms and provide supportive care.

THE BEST WAY TO AVOID WEST NILE ENCEPHALITIS IS TO AVOID MOSQUITO BITES!

It is not necessary to limit any outdoor activities unless there is evidence of mosquito-borne disease in your area. However, you can always help to reduce your risk of mosquito bites by:

- Wearing shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors for long periods of time, and
- Considering the use of a mosquito repellent when it is necessary to be outdoors at times when mosquitoes are most active. Be sure to follow the instructions on the label.

CONTROL MOSQUITOES IN AND AROUND YOUR HOME

Many mosquitoes need standing water to lay their eggs. To reduce the mosquito population in and around your home, reduce or eliminate all standing water:

- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers.
- Dispose of used tires. Call your local landfill or Department of Public Works to find out how to dispose of them properly.
- Remove all leaf debris.
- Drill holes in the bottoms of all recycling containers that are kept outdoors.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly, and clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Change the water in bird baths twice weekly.
- Clean vegetation and debris from the edge of ponds.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs.
- Drain water from pool covers.
- Use landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property.

The New York State Department of Health is using dead crow sightings and laboratory testing of birds to help track West Nile virus. If you see a dead bird, contact your local health department. You will be told if the bird should be collected and tested. Not all dead birds will be tested. If the bird is not collected for testing, you may dispose of it. Wear gloves, double bag the bird, and place it in the trash.

For more information on West Nile virus and the “Fight the Bite” campaign, visit the State Health Department’s Web site at: **www.health.state.ny.us**

