

## What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus was first found in the United States in 1999. The virus was previously found only in parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. It was probably introduced into this country by an infected mosquito or bird.

West Nile Virus is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes to mammals, birds and humans. A mosquito infected with WNV may infect a bird when taking a blood meal from that bird. Other mosquitoes can then pick up the virus from the infected bird. Other animals, including horses, and people can become infected when bitten by a mosquito that is carrying the virus.

In a very small number of cases, WNV also has spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and even during pregnancy from mother to baby. WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.

West Nile virus cases occur primarily in the late summer or early fall, although mosquito season is April through October.

## What are the symptoms?

West Nile Virus can cause encephalitis, or inflammation of the brain, in susceptible animals and people.

People with mild infections may experience fever, headache, body aches, skin rash and swollen lymph glands. People with more severe infections may experience high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions and paralysis.

## Who is most at risk?

People over 50 years of age have the highest risk of developing a severe illness because as we age, our bodies have a harder time fighting off disease. People with compromised immune systems are also at increased risk. However, anyone can get the virus.

Birds and horses are the animals most likely to develop illness from infection with West Nile Virus. Crows are especially susceptible, and most crows that are infected become sick and die. Raptor populations have also been hit hard in many locations.

Not all horses that become infected actually get sick. In horses that do become ill, symptoms can range from mild depression and lethargy to signs of severe neurologic disease.

West Nile Virus has been diagnosed in other animals, including dogs and cats. Most of these animals did not show any signs of illness after infection.

**To report dead birds call  
1-877-PA-HEALTH.**

## Is there treatment or a vaccine?

The only vaccine developed for WNV so far is for horses. No vaccine is available for humans or birds.

There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus infection, only supportive care. While most people fully recover from the virus, in some severe cases, a patient may need to be hospitalized.

## Prevention

Only a few of the approx. 60 different species of mosquitoes in PA. carry WNV.

Mosquitoes lay their eggs in stagnant water. Weeds, tall grass, shrubbery and discarded tires also provide an outdoor home for adult mosquitoes. By eliminating breeding places, we can help reduce exposure to the virus.

- σ Dispose of outdoor cans, pots, and other containers that may hold water
- σ Remove discarded tires
- σ Turn over wading pools when not in use
- σ Clean and chlorinate swimming pools when not in use
- σ Remove leaves and debris from roof gutters
- σ Aerate ornamental pools or add fish to the pools
- σ Drill holes in the bottom of outdoor recycling containers
- σ Turn over or remove buckets and wheelbarrows that could collect water
- σ Flush and clean water troughs at least every 4 days
- σ Use landscaping to eliminate standing water
- σ Discourage birds from roosting in your barn
- σ Report unexplained dead birds to the Pennsylvania Department of Health

***Remember: Mosquitoes can multiply in any water puddle that lasts more than 4 days.***

## How can I protect myself

It is not necessary to limit any outdoor activities, unless local officials advise you otherwise.

However, you can and should try to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes.

In addition to reducing stagnant water in your yard, make sure all windows and doors have screens, and that all screens are in good repair.

## What if WNV is found in MY area

Take normal steps to prevent insect bites.

Wear shoes, socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors for long periods of time, or when mosquitoes are most active.

Consider the use of mosquito repellent, according to directions, when it is necessary to be outdoors. Wash all treated skin and clothing when returning indoors.

***Electromagnetic and ultrasound devices and Vitamin B are not effective in preventing mosquito bites.***

This information was gathered by

### Red Creek Wildlife Center

Redcreekwildlifecenter.com

From the following sources:

*Pennsylvania State Departments of:*

Health

Game Commission

Agriculture

Aging

Conservation and Natural Resources

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