



## 1. What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne infection that can cause serious illness. Mosquitoes can bite and infect humans and make them sick. The disease occurs during warm weather months (June to October) when mosquitoes are active.

## 2. Who gets West Nile virus?

All residents of areas where West Nile virus activity has been found are at risk of getting the disease. Those at highest risk of serious illness and death are over 50, or have weak immune systems from another illness (such as those with HIV/AIDS or diabetes).

## 3. How is West Nile virus spread?

This virus is usually spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. The mosquitoes carry the virus after they become infected from feeding on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can spread west nile virus to humans and other animals that they bite. Not all mosquitoes are infected with the virus but it is best to avoid mosquitoes and stay safe.

West Nile virus has been spread through a blood transfusion or an organ transplantation in a small number of cases. As a result, the U.S. blood collection agencies routinely screen blood donations to detect the virus.

## 4. How do you know if you have West Nile virus?

The types of symptoms people can develop are:

- Severe : high fever, headache, neck stiffness, and/or disorientation
- Mild: headache, muscle aches, fatigue, possible rash that can last a few days
- None: most people infected with West Nile virus do not develop symptoms

**If you develop severe symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.**

## 5. How is West Nile virus treated?

There is no specific treatment for the disease. A physician may provide treatment to relieve the symptoms of the illness. In severe cases, hospitalization may be required.

## 6. What can be done to prevent the spread of West Nile virus?

**The best way to avoid West Nile virus is to prevent mosquito bites.**

- **Protect yourself:** use insect repellent with DEET, oil of lemon eucalyptus, Picaridin, or IR3535 when you go outdoors; always follow label instructions on how to use the repellent
- **Cover up:** wearing shoes, socks, long sleeve shirts, and long pants when outdoors can help prevent bites
- **Avoid mosquitoes:** limit outdoor activities from dawn to dusk during mosquito season (June to October) when mosquitoes are active
- **Mosquito-proof your home:** install and repair screens on windows and doors
- **Don't breed mosquitoes:** mosquitoes lay their eggs in water so be sure to...
  - often check and empty any containers that may hold water in your yard such as flower pots, uncovered garbage bins, and old tires
  - avoid over watering lawns and fields, and clean rain gutters to prevent water from making puddles
  - keep a clean and well maintained swimming pool

## 7. What else do I need to know about West Nile virus?

- Routine contact with birds (alive or dead) or other animals cannot spread the disease to humans.
- Dead birds should be reported to Los Angeles County Veterinary Public Health at 1-877-747-2243
- Contact your local mosquito control agency for mosquito problems where you live and work. Find them at [www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/westnile.htm](http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/westnile.htm)

### Sources

1. *West Nile virus*. L.A. County Department of Public Health. <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/vectorwestnile.htm>
2. *West Nile virus*. California Department of Public Health. <http://www.westnile.ca.gov>
3. *West Nile virus*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>

For additional resources, visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>.