



## West Nile Virus



### What is it? What can happen?

The West Nile virus (WNV) is spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. It can cause fever, headache and muscle aches usually lasting a week or less. Rash and swollen glands are common. Occasionally (less than 1% of cases) it causes encephalitis (swelling of the brain) or meningitis (swelling of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

### How is it spread?

WNV is spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. WNV is mostly a disease of birds, but can spread to humans by mosquitoes that have fed on both birds and humans. The virus is not known to spread from person-to-person, nor from bird-to-person.

### How is it treated?

If you are bitten by a mosquito, no treatment or tests are needed unless symptoms develop. There is no specific treatment or vaccine for WNV. Some people with severe illness may require hospitalization. Most people who are infected with West Nile virus recover fully.

### Can I get sick from WNV?

Most people who become infected with WNV do not develop symptoms or have very mild symptoms. Symptoms appear 3 to 15 days following the bite of an infected mosquito and can range from a mild fever, headache and mild flu-like illness, to rapid onset of severe headache, high fever, stiff neck, muscle weakness, or disorientation. Severe symptoms are more likely to occur in the elderly, the very young and those with suppressed immune systems. In rare cases, it can result in death; however, most people recover fully.

### How can I protect myself?

Mosquitoes are most active from May through September and from dusk to dawn. To protect you from mosquito bites, the following personal precautions should be taken:

- Limit your time outdoors when mosquitoes are most active (from May to September, from dusk to dawn).
- If you must be outside when mosquitoes are active, wear protective clothing such as long pants, long sleeves, shoes and socks.
- Wear light-coloured clothing. Mosquitoes are attracted to dark, more intense colours.
- Use an insect repellent on exposed skin when outside in places and at times when mosquitoes are most active.