

Fast Facts: West Nile Virus

West Nile Virus is a potentially lethal virus contracted by being bitten by a mosquito that carries the disease. West Nile Virus can infect humans, birds, mammals, mosquitoes and horses, and is most commonly contracted in late summer or early fall.

Did You Know?

By taking the following precautions, your risk of contracting West Nile Virus can be reduced dramatically:

- Cover any exposed skin and clothing with mosquito repellent that contains DEET;
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants when going outdoors;
- Remove any standing water around your home weekly;
- Try to avoid being outside during dusk or dawn when mosquitoes are at their worst; and
- Make sure all methods of entry for a mosquito are blocked (i.e. screen windows, doors that close properly, etc.)

Things To Watch For

If you have been infected with the West Nile Virus, you may have no symptoms at all. However, in mild cases where symptoms are found, watch for:

- Fever, headaches and general malaise; and
- A skin rash along the core of the body.

More serious West Nile Virus infections are more common in people with depressed immune function, and display symptoms such as:

- Headaches, high fevers and neck stiffness;
- Trance-like states, confusion, and coma;
- Seizures, muscle weakness or paralysis or trembling limbs.

Treatment

Most people who contract West Nile Virus make a full recovery without medical intervention in approximately two weeks. However, more serious cases such as encephalitis or meningitis will require hospitalization. Currently, there is no vaccine to protect against the disease.

Sources and Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: West Nile Virus
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dybid/westnile/qa/overview.htm>

U.S Food and Drug Administration: West Nile Virus, Reducing the Risk
http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2003/103_virus.html

Mayo Clinic: West Nile Virus
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/invoke.cfm?id=DS00438>