

**What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?**

WNV can be a serious illness. It can affect people, horses, certain types of birds and other animals. In Washington, WNV was found in 2002 for the first time in birds and horses, but the first human cases were not until 2006. Most infections occur in the summer and fall, and people with a weakened immune system and those over 50 years of age have the highest risk of serious illness.

**What are the symptoms of WNV?**

About 80% of people who are infected with WNV will not have any symptoms at all. Of the persons who become ill most will develop a mild illness called West Nile fever (WNF). WNF lasts between a few days to several weeks, and includes symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. About 1 in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. Symptoms of severe illness include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent or fatal.

**How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms usually appear between 2 and 14 days after exposure, but can be up to 21 days in people with weakened immune systems.

**How is WNV spread?**

WNV is usually spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on birds infected with the virus. Rarely, WNV has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding, and during pregnancy from mother to baby. There is no evidence that West Nile virus can be spread by direct contact (touching or kissing) with infected people or animals.

**How is WNV diagnosed and treated?**

Diagnosis is usually made by testing the blood, spinal fluid or other body fluids. There is no specific treatment for WNV infection. Most people recover without need for medical treatment, but in more severe cases, people usually need to be hospitalized so they can receive supportive treatment, including intravenous fluids, help with breathing, or other specialized medical care. Pregnant women and nursing mothers are encouraged to talk to their doctor if they develop symptoms that could be WNV.

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### **How can I prevent a WNV infection?**

There is no human vaccine for WNV. The best way to protect yourself and your family is to avoid mosquito bites and reduce the places mosquitoes might live or breed around your home.

1. Make sure windows and doors are “bug tight.” Repair or replace all screens.
2. Stay indoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are the most active.
3. Wear a long sleeve shirt, long pants and a hat when going into mosquito-infested areas, such as wetlands or woods.
4. Use mosquito repellent when necessary. Read the label and carefully follow instructions. Take special care when using repellent on children.
5. When you are outdoors, use insect repellents containing an EPA-registered insect repellent. Follow the directions on the package. Mosquito repellents that contain the EPA approved active ingredients DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR3535 are the most effective for offering long lasting protection against mosquito bites.
6. Permethrin is another long-lasting repellent that is intended for application to clothing and gear, but not directly to skin.
7. Empty or throw away anything that holds standing water—bottles, cans, old tires, buckets, plastic covers and toys.
8. Change water in your birdbaths, fountains, wading pools and animal troughs at least twice each week.
9. Make sure roof gutters drain properly; and clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
10. Fix leaky outdoor faucets and sprinklers.

West Nile virus is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department. In Snohomish County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 425.339.5278, Monday-Friday, 8:00 AM- 5:00PM.

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