



Fight The Bite

West Nile Virus

Senior Citizens

West Nile virus, a mosquito-borne virus that can cause serious illness, was first found in Mississippi in 2001. While the chances of anyone becoming ill are small, persons over 50 years of age are typically at higher risk for serious illness.

Mild cases of West Nile infection might include a slight fever or headache. More severe infections, including encephalitis, are marked by high fever, headache, confusion, muscle aches and weakness, seizures and paralysis. At its most severe, the infection can result in coma, permanent brain damage and death. Symptoms usually occur 3 to 14 days after exposure. No specific treatment exists for West Nile virus infections, other than to treat the symptoms and provide supportive care. There is no vaccine to protect humans against West Nile encephalitis.

The best way to avoid West Nile virus encephalitis is to avoid mosquito bites!

You can always help reduce your risk of mosquito bites, even without limiting outdoor activities. However, in areas or at times that there are large numbers of mosquitoes or evidence of mosquito-borne disease, limiting outdoor activities may be prudent.

- West Nile virus is transmitted *primarily* through the bite of an infected mosquito. However, there have been isolated cases occurring in blood transfusion and organ donation recipients; from mother to baby during pregnancy; and through breast milk. People cannot become infected through ordinary contact with an infected bird, horse or human.
- Spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin since mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing. Do not apply repellents containing permethrin directly to exposed skin. If you spray your clothing, there is no need to spray repellent containing DEET on the skin under your clothing.
- Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. The more DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide or N, N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide) a repellent contains the longer it can protect you from mosquito bites. A higher percentage of DEET in a repellent does not mean that your protection is better — just that it will last longer. DEET concentrations higher than 50% do not increase the length of protection. Choose a repellent that provides protection for the amount of time that you will be outdoors.
- Products with up to 30% DEET will provide adequate protection under most conditions.
- Whenever you use an insecticide or insect repellent, be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's DIRECTIONS FOR USE, as printed on the product label.
- When possible, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors.
- Consider staying indoors between dusk and dawn, which are peak mosquito biting times.

Control mosquitoes in and around your home

Many mosquitoes need standing water to lay their eggs. To reduce the mosquito population in and around your home, reduce or eliminate all standing water:

- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers.
- Remove all discarded tires on the property. Used tires have become the most common mosquito breeding site in the country.

- Remove all leaf debris.
- Close garbage can lids. Be sure water does not collect in the bottom of garbage cans .
- Drill holes in the bottoms of all recycling containers that are kept outdoors .
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly, and clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use .
- Change the water in bird baths frequently (every 2-3 days).
- Clean vegetation and debris from the edge of ponds .
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs .
- Drain water from pool covers.
- Use landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property .
- Repair damaged or torn window and door screens .
- Remove outdoor pet food and water dishes that are not being used.
- Flush livestock water troughs twice a week.
- Check around construction sites or do-it-yourself improvements to ensure that proper backfilling and grading prevent drainage problems.
- If you know of specific mosquito control problems call your local city or county public works director , City Hall, or the Board of Supervisors .

For more information on West Nile virus and the “*Fight the Bite*” campaign, visit the Department’s web site at: www.HealthyMS.com



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