



Frequently Asked Questions about West Nile Virus

Q1) What is West Nile virus?

A) WNV is a mosquito-borne infection that can cause serious illness. Although the chance of a person getting sick is slim, there are some simple steps you can take to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes (see Questions 9 to 12).

Q2) What are the symptoms of West Nile virus infection?

A) Mild cases of West Nile infection may include a slight fever and headache. More severe infections are marked by a rapid onset of a high fever with head and body aches, disorientation, tremors, and convulsions. In more severe cases, paralysis or death has occurred. Symptoms usually occur between 5 and 15 days after exposure. There is no specific treatment other than to treat the symptoms and provide supportive care.

Q3) Who is at highest risk for becoming seriously ill?

A) People who are at highest risk for serious illness are those over the age of 50 and those with compromised immune systems. Healthy children and adults are at very low risk for infection.

Q4) Can my pet be infected?

A) WNV has been confirmed in some domestic animals, including pet birds, dogs, and cats. Horses can become seriously ill if infected. It is important to remember that birds and animals cannot transmit WNV to people. For questions about WNV in pets and other domestic animals, please contact the State Veterinarian at (207) 287-7613 or (207) 287-7615.

Q5) Do all mosquitoes transmit West Nile virus?

A) No. Most mosquitoes do not transmit disease. While there are about 40 different species of mosquitoes in Maine, only certain species have been associated with WNV.

Q6) Where do mosquitoes usually live and breed?

A) Mosquitoes lay their eggs in moist areas such as standing water. The eggs become larva that remain in the water until the adults mature and fly off. Weeds, tall grass, and shrubbery provide an outdoor home for adult mosquitoes. They can also enter houses through unscreened windows and doors. Many mosquitoes will breed in containers that hold water, including flower pots and discarded tires.

Q7) When are mosquitoes most active?

A) Some mosquitoes are most active between dusk and dawn, when the air is calm. However, others will feed at any time of day.

Q8) What birds can carry West Nile virus?

A) As of 2003, there are over 130 bird species potentially affected by WNV. Corvids, which include crows, blue jays, and ravens, are the first indicators of a WNV infection within a community. Therefore, the Maine CDC is using sightings and testing of all types of corvids to track WNV. If you find a dead bird please dispose of it properly, for information about how to do this listen to the automated directions provided at 1-888-697-5846.

Q9) What should I do to minimize my exposure to West Nile virus?

A) There is no evidence that birds can directly transmit WNV to people, but please do not use your bare hands to handle dead birds. Plastic or latex gloves, a shovel, or doubled plastic bags can be used to handle a dead bird. When you have finished handling the bird, wash your hands with soap and water.

Q10) How can I protect myself and my family?

A) The following steps can help minimize the risk of WNV infection:

- Dispose of unused tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots, or similar water-holding containers.
- Remove all discarded tires on your property. Used tires are very significant mosquito breeding sites.
- Drill holes in the bottoms of recycling containers that are kept outdoors.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly, and clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Remove leaf debris and keep brush trimmed.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Change the water in birdbaths frequently.
- Clean vegetation and debris from the edges 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.

Q11) Should we stay indoors?

A) It is not necessary to limit any outdoor activities. However, you can and should try to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes. In addition to reducing standing water in your yard, make sure all windows and doors have screens, and that all screens are in good repair. If West Nile Virus is found in your area:

- Wear shoes, socks, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors for long periods of time, or when mosquitoes are most active.

- Avoid being outdoors during times when mosquitoes are most active, such as dawn and dusk.
- Use an insect repellent with DEET on your skin and apply permethrin to your clothes.

Q11) Are DEET and permethrin safe?

A) According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) Committee on Environmental Health updated their recommendation for use of DEET products on children in 2003, citing: "Insect repellents containing DEET with a concentration of 10% appear to be as safe as products with a concentration of 30% when used according to the directions on the product labels." AAP recommends that repellents with DEET should not be used on infants less than 2 months old.

Permethrin is highly effective as an insecticide and as a repellent. Permethrin-treated clothing repels and kills ticks and mosquitoes, and retains this effect after repeated laundering. The permethrin insecticide should be reapplied following the label instructions. Some commercial products are available pretreated with permethrin.

Q12) What else can we do?

A) In addition to reducing potential breeding sites on your own property, you can encourage your neighbors, local businesses, and municipal agencies to do so as well. You can also work with local service, labor, religious and fraternal organizations to promote community-wide clean up activities.

Q13) What is the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) doing about West Nile virus?

A) The state has developed a surveillance system to track the emergence of West Nile virus (WNV) in Maine. By tracking the spread of the virus, prevention efforts can be better focused to help educate the public in ways in which Mainers can protect themselves and their families from the disease.



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