

West Nile Virus

Frequently Asked Questions



What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a potentially serious illness that humans get after being bitten by an infected mosquito. West Nile virus is seen more in the summer and fall months.

What are the symptoms?

Many people who are infected with WNV will not experience any symptoms. About 20% of people will develop a milder illness and less than 1% will develop more severe symptoms.

Mild symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Body aches
- Nausea
- Skin rash on the chest, stomach, and back

Severe symptoms can include:

- High fever
- Neck stiffness
- Disorientation
- Coma
- Muscle weakness
- Vision loss
- Numbness and paralysis
- Seizures and shaking

How does it spread?

Most cases of WNV occur after people have been bitten by an infected mosquito. However, in some cases people can be infected with WNV through blood transfusions, organ donation, and during pregnancy from mother to child. WNV is not spread through touching or kissing.

Who is at risk of developing WNV?

People over the age of 50 and people with weak immune systems are more likely to develop some of the severe symptoms of WNV if they become sick. It is important for these individuals and all others to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes.

What should I do if I think I have it?

Most persons with mild WNV illness do not need to seek medical attention as they usually get better on their own. Persons with severe headaches or confusion, symptoms of severe WNV illness, should seek medical attention immediately. Women who are pregnant or nursing are encouraged to talk to their healthcare provider if they develop symptoms that could be WNV.

How is it prevented?

- Use insect repellent that contains DEET or Picaridin.
- Avoid being outdoors during dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. If you are outdoors during this time, wear long sleeves and pants and use insect repellent.
- Use screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out.
- Prevent mosquitoes from breeding by emptying anything that contains standing water such as flowerpots, buckets, and barrels. Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird-baths weekly.

For more information contact your doctor, refer to <http://www.phila.gov/Health/> or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.

