

FACT SHEET: Q's & A's About West Nile Virus

- Q. If I live in an area where birds or mosquitoes with West Nile Virus have been reported and a mosquito bites me, am I likely to get sick?**
- A. No. Even in areas where the virus is circulating, very few mosquitoes are infected with the virus. Even if the mosquito is infected, less than 1% of people who get bitten and become infected will get severely ill. The chances you will become severely ill from any one mosquito bite are extremely small.
- Q. What should wild game hunters do to protect against West Nile Virus infection?**
- A. Hunters should follow the usual precautions when handling wild animals. If they anticipate being exposed to mosquitoes, they should apply insect repellent to clothing and skin, according to label instructions, to prevent mosquito bites. Hunters should wear gloves when handling and cleaning animals to prevent blood exposure to bare hands and meat should be cooked thoroughly.
- Q. Can you get West Nile encephalitis from another person?**
- A. No. West Nile encephalitis is NOT transmitted from person-to-person. For example, you cannot get West Nile virus from touching or kissing a person who has the disease, or from a health care worker who has treated someone with the disease.
- Q. Is a woman's pregnancy at risk if she gets infected with West Nile Virus?**
- A. There is one documented case of transplacental (mother-to-child) transmission of WNV in humans. Although the newborn in this case was infected with WNV at birth and had severe medical problems, it is unknown whether the WNV infection itself caused these problems or whether they were coincidental. More research will be needed to improve our understanding of the relationship – if any – between WNV infection and adverse birth outcomes.
- Q. How do health care providers test for West Nile Virus?**
- A. Your physician will first take a medical history to assess your risk for West Nile Virus. People who live in or traveled to areas where West Nile Virus activity has been identified are at risk of getting West Nile encephalitis; persons older than 50 years of age have the highest risk of severe disease. If you are determined to be at high risk and have symptoms of West Nile encephalitis, your provider will draw a sample and send it to a commercial or public health laboratory for confirmation.
- Q. If my community sprays pesticides for adult mosquitoes, what should I do during spraying?**
- A. The EPA does not require relocating or taking special precautions during mosquito control spraying. However, some people may prefer to avoid or to minimize exposure by staying indoors, keeping their windows closed, keeping their air conditioners and window fans off, keeping their children's toys indoors and keeping their pets indoors. Since the effects of ground and aerial spraying dissipate in a few hours, it is not necessary to wash off outdoor furniture or playground equipment before use, although doing so will not diminish the effectiveness of the pesticide application. Anyone experiencing adverse reactions to pesticides should seek medical care or call Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.
- Q. How long does the West Nile Virus remain in a person's body after they are infected?**
- There is no scientific evidence indicating that people can be chronically infected with West Nile Virus. What remains in a person's body for long periods of time are antibodies and "memory" white blood cells (T-lymphocytes) that the body produces to the virus. These antibodies and T-lymphocytes last for years, and may last for the rest of a person's life. Antibodies are what many diagnostic tests look for when clinical laboratory testing is performed. Both antibodies and "memory" T-lymphocytes provide future protection from the virus.
- Q. If a person contracts West Nile Virus, does that person develop a natural immunity to future infection by the virus?**
- A. It is assumed that immunity will be lifelong; however it may wane in later years.
- Q. If someone in my family is bitten by a mosquito, should he or she be tested?**
- A. No, even in those areas where mosquito-borne illnesses are present very few mosquitoes are infected.
- Q. Are infants at higher risk than other groups for illness with West Nile Virus?**
- A. No. West Nile Virus illnesses in children younger than 1-year-old are infrequent. During 1999-2001, no cases in children younger than one year of age were reported to C.D.C. Of the over 2500 total West Nile Virus cases in 2002, only four were less than one year of age.
- Q. If I'm breastfeeding, should I use insect repellent containing DEET?**
- A. Yes. Insect repellents help people reduce their exposure to mosquito bites that carry potentially serious viruses such as West Nile Virus, and allow them to continue to play and work outdoors. There are not reported adverse events following use of repellents containing DEET in pregnant or breast-feeding women.
- Q. How does West Nile Virus actually cause severe illness and death in humans?**
- A. Following transmission by an infected mosquito, West Nile Virus multiplies in the person's blood system and crosses the blood-brain barrier to reach the brain. The virus interferes with normal central nervous system functioning and causes inflammation of brain tissue.
- Q. I think I have symptoms of West Nile Virus. What should I do?**
- A. Contact your health care provider if you have concerns about your health. If you or your family members develop symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, and severe headaches, you should see your doctor immediately.
- Q. Is there a vaccine against West Nile encephalitis?**
- A. No, but several companies are working towards developing a vaccine.

For More Information Contact or Visit the Following Websites:
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(810) 987-5306
www.stclaircounty.org/offices/health/updates.asp
www.michigan.gov/westnilevirus
www.cdc.gov