

West Nile Virus Fact Sheet

Florida Department of Health in Escambia County
www.EscambiaHealth.com



What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a disease that is carried by mosquitoes. There is more WNV activity in the summer and early the fall, mostly due to wet weather.

How is WNV spread?

- **Mosquitoes** – Infected mosquitoes are the main carrier of WNV to people. A mosquito becomes infected when it bites an infected bird. The infected mosquito then bites, and infects, humans and other animals.
- **Transfusions, Transplants, & Mother-to-Child** – In a very small number of cases, WNV has spread from person-to-person through blood transfusions, organ transplants, pregnancy, or breastfeeding.
- **WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.**

What are the symptoms of WNV?

- **Serious Symptoms in a Few People.** Only about 1 in 150 people who have WNV will become very sick. Severe symptoms include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, confusion, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, and numbness. These symptoms may last several weeks, and some effects may be permanent.
- **Milder Symptoms in Some People.** About 1 out of 5 people who have WNV may have fever, head and body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash. These problems can last for a few days to several weeks.
- **No Symptoms in Most People.** Approximately 4 out of 5 people who have WNV will not feel sick at all, but there is no way to know who will get sick and who will not.
- **People usually start to feel sick 3-14 days after they are bitten by an infected mosquito.**

What is the risk to homeless and under-housed people?

Mosquitoes are most active at night, especially during dusk and dawn. Being outside increases your risk of being bitten by an infected mosquito. People over the age of 50, and those with weak immune systems, have a higher risk of becoming very ill.

What can I do to prevent WNV?

- **The best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites.**
- **Avoid areas of standing water.** Mosquitoes like to live and breed in places where water collects, such as puddles, garbage cans, flower pots, bottles, cans, broken appliances, old tires, buckets, drums, and barrels.
- **Cover up as much as possible.** Wear shoes, socks, long-sleeves, and pants; tuck pants into socks for extra protection.
- **Wear insect repellent.** Use a mosquito repellent with DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535. Apply repellent on bare skin and on clothing. Read label directions carefully before you apply repellent. Always follow the directions carefully.

What should I do if I think I have WNV?

- Milder WNV illness may improve without the need to see a doctor.
- Symptoms that do require a visit to the doctor include severe headaches, fever lasting more than one day, or confusion. Severe WNV illness may require a hospital stay.
- Pregnant women and nursing mothers should see a doctor if they develop any problems that could be caused by WNV.

For Additional Information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/westnile/index.html>

Florida Department of Health: <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Environment/medicine/arthoviral/index.html>

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Escambia County Mosquito Control: 850-937-2188