



Florida Department of Health in Escambia County

West Nile Virus

Local Impact

The Florida Department of Health in Escambia County reported 15 cases of West Nile in 2012. This was a significant increase since there had not been any cases reported since 2008. There were only 2 reported during that year. West Nile virus illness can be prevented so the disease will be reviewed as well as defensive actions you can take.



What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is an arthropod-borne virus (arbovirus) most commonly spread by infected mosquitoes. West Nile virus can cause febrile illness, encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

West Nile virus transmission has been documented in Europe and the Middle East, Africa, India, parts of Asia, and Australia. It was first detected in North America in 1999, and has since spread across the continental United States and Canada.

How do people get infected with West Nile virus?

Most people get infected with West Nile virus by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can then spread the virus to humans and other animals.

Is there a vaccine available to protect people from West Nile virus?

No. Currently there is no West Nile virus vaccine available for people. Many scientists are working on this issue, and there is hope that a vaccine will become available in the future.

How soon do people get sick after getting bitten by an infected mosquito?

The incubation period is usually 2 to 6 days but ranges from 2 to 14 days. This period can be longer in people with certain medical conditions that affect the immune system.

What are the symptoms of West Nile virus disease?

No symptoms in most people. Most people (70-80%) who become infected with West Nile virus do not develop any symptoms.

Febrile illness in some people. About 1 in 5 people who are infected will develop a fever with other symptoms such as headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea, or rash. Most people with this type of West Nile virus disease recover completely, but fatigue and weakness can last for weeks or months.

Severe symptoms in a few people. Less than 1% of people who are infected will develop a serious neurologic illness such as encephalitis or meningitis (inflammation of the brain or surrounding tissues). The symptoms of neurologic illness can include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, seizures, or paralysis.

Recovery from severe disease may take several weeks or months. Some of the neurologic effects may be permanent. About 10 percent of people who develop neurologic infection due to West Nile virus will die.

What should I do if I think a family member might have West Nile virus disease?

Consult a physician for evaluation and diagnosis.

How is West Nile virus disease diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on a combination of clinical signs and symptoms and specialized laboratory tests of blood or spinal fluid. These tests typically detect antibodies that the immune system makes against the viral infection.

What is the treatment for West Nile virus disease?

There are no medications to treat or vaccines to prevent West Nile virus infection. Over-the-counter medication can be used to reduce fever and relieve pain.

When do most cases of West Nile virus disease occur?

Most people are infected from June through September.

How can people reduce the chance of getting infected?

The most effective way to avoid West Nile virus disease is to prevent mosquito bites:

- Drain standing water from garbage cans, pool covers, birdbaths, and flower pots to prevent mosquitoes from living and multiplying around your home.
- Cover your skin with clothing or insect repellent to stop the bite. Do not let mosquitoes get the best of you!



For more information on West Nile virus please visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/westnile/index.html>