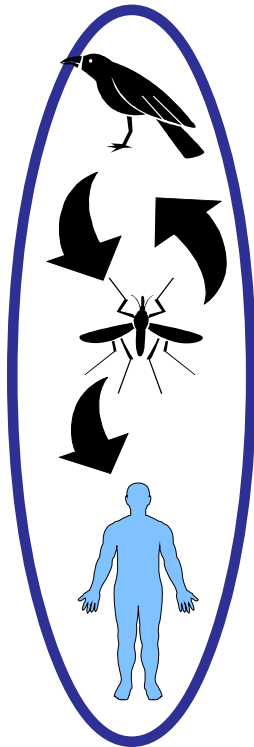


## WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS ?

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) in humans and other animals. The virus is named after the West Nile region of Uganda where it was first isolated in 1937. The virus appeared for the first time in the United States during a 1999 outbreak in New York that killed seven people. The first human case of the virus in Virginia appeared in 2002.

## HOW IS WEST NILE VIRUS SPREAD ?

West Nile virus is almost always spread to humans, birds and other animals through the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that is carrying the virus. West Nile virus is not spread from person to person, but a small number of cases were a result of blood transfusions or organ transplants from infected people. There may also be a risk of infected mothers transmitting the virus to their unborn or nursing children.



## WHAT ARE MY CHANCES OF GETTING WEST NILE VIRUS ?

In areas where West Nile virus has been detected, only a small proportion of mosquitoes are likely to be infected. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito do not become sick.

Less than 1% of people who are infected will become seriously ill.

10-15 percent of those seriously ill die.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS ?

The symptoms generally appear about 3-14 days after exposure. People over age 50 are at greater risk of severe illness.

Milder symptoms include

- slight fever
- headache
- body aches
- swollen glands
- sometimes a skin rash

Severe symptoms include

- high fever
- intense headache
- stiff neck
- confusion

**Most people bitten by a mosquito infected with West Nile virus do not get sick.**

## WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I HAVE WEST NILE VIRUS ?

If you are bitten by a mosquito, you don't need to see a doctor. Most people who suffer a mild illness due to West Nile virus recover, and no treatment is necessary. Only supportive treatment is available for more serious cases. Testing for West Nile virus in people involves a blood or spinal fluid test that can take several weeks to confirm. No vaccine exists at this time for West Nile virus infection in humans.

## PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH

The Virginia Department of Health, along with multiple other agencies, is monitoring for mosquito-borne viruses in birds, mosquitoes, horses and humans. The information collected is used to advise local authorities and the public about the potential threat of West Nile virus in Virginia.

## REPORTING DEAD BIRDS

The public can help state officials monitor for the virus by reporting dead crows, bluejays and birds of prey to their local health department. Selected birds will be tested for the virus. Birds must be tested within 24 hours of death before they become too decomposed. Sunken eyes and the presence of fly larvae (maggots) are good indicators that the bird has been dead too long.

## **PREVENT WEST NILE VIRUS**

Eliminate mosquito breeding areas around the home. Several of the species of mosquitoes most likely to carry West Nile virus can breed in containers in your own backyard.

### **Control Mosquitoes from Breeding**

- Turn over or remove containers in your yard where rainwater collects, such as potted plant trays, buckets or toys.
- Empty birdbaths once a week.
- Remove old tires from your yard.
- Drain wading pools often.
- Clean roof gutters and downspout screens.
- Eliminate standing water on flat roofs.
- Do not allow water to collect in garbage cans.

### **Protect Yourself and Your Family**

- Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.
- If possible, stay indoors when mosquitoes are biting.
- Use insect repellent with the smallest percentage of DEET that protects for the length of time you are exposed to mosquitoes, but no more than 50% for adults and 30% for children under 12.
- Only adults should apply repellent on children.
- Spray repellent on your hands and then apply to your face.
- Only apply repellent to exposed skin and clothing. Do not use repellent under clothing.
- Do not apply repellent over cuts, wounds, sunburn, or irritated skin.
- Wash off repellent daily and reapply as needed.

## **WEB SITES**

Virginia Department of Health  
[www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov)

Virginia Mosquito Control Association  
[www.mosquito-va.org/index.html](http://www.mosquito-va.org/index.html)

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

EPA Pesticides & Mosquito Control  
[www.epa.gov/pesticides/](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/)

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

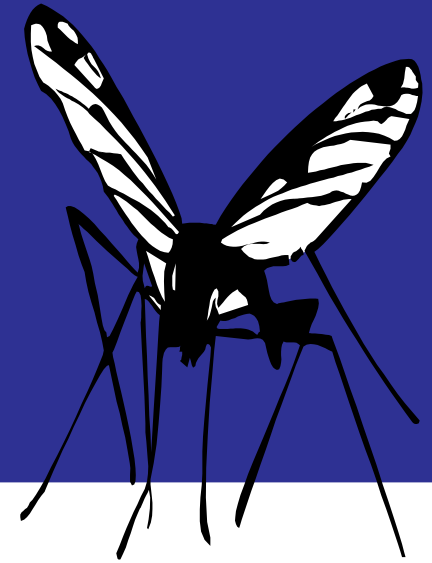
Contact your local Health Department or local Cooperative Extension Service office.



Revised 4/05

## **WEST NILE VIRUS**

### **PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY**



- **Risks & Symptoms**
- **Prevention & Surveillance**
- **Reporting Dead Birds**