



West Nile Virus Fact Sheet

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) causes an infection called West Nile Fever, which sometimes results in meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) or encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain). People can get West Nile virus if a mosquito with the virus bites them.

What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?

Most people will have no symptoms or mild illness with symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, skin rash, and swollen lymph glands. In some people, especially those over age 50, WNV can cause serious disease with symptoms such as high fever, neck stiffness, joint pain, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis, and occasionally death. Usually symptoms start 5 to 15 days after exposure. There is no specific treatment except to treat the symptoms and provide supportive care.

How is the disease spread?

Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds, which may have the virus in their blood for a few days. After a certain time period, infected mosquitoes can spread West Nile virus to humans and animals while biting. West Nile virus is **not** spread from person to person. For example, you cannot get West Nile virus from touching, kissing or being around a person who has the disease.

What bird(s) can carry West Nile virus?

Although most birds infected with West Nile virus have been crows, infections have been found in other types of birds, including the raven, rock dove, sand hill crane, fish crow, blue jay, bald eagle, laughing gull, black-crowned night heron, mallard, Canadian goose, robin, sparrow, racing pigeon, red-tailed hawk and broad-winged hawk. It is important to remember that you cannot get the West Nile virus directly from birds, but gloves should be worn when handling any dead bird or mammal.

Can my dog or cat be infected?

West Nile virus has been identified in horses, dogs, and a cat. Humans cannot get West Nile virus from horses, cats or dogs.

How can I protect my family and myself?

The best way to prevent infection from West Nile virus and other viruses that you can get from mosquitoes is to avoid mosquitos' bites and reduce their population around your home.

To reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes:

- Make sure all windows and doors have screens, and all screens are in good repair.



- Minimize time spent outdoors between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear shoes, socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt if you must be outdoors when mosquitoes are active.
- Use mosquito repellent, containing DEET (N,N –diethyl-metatoluamide), when it is necessary to be outdoors: the more DEET a repellent contains, the longer time it provides protection. However, DEET content greater than 30 percent does not enhance the duration of protection, and may increase your chances of having side effects. DEET is contraindicated for children younger than two months of age.

To reduce the mosquito population around your home:

- Get rid of all standing water.
- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers.
- Remove all discarded tires from your property.
- Drill holes in the bottoms of recycling containers that are kept outdoors.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly, and clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Change the water in birdbaths.
- Clean vegetation and debris from edges of ponds.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs.
- Drain water from pool covers.
- Use landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property.

What is being done in my community to prevent West Nile virus infections?

The Florida Department of Health, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and other state and local agencies have a monitoring program to identify West Nile virus infections in birds and humans. If West Nile virus is identified in Florida, mosquito control and other preventive measures will be implemented.

What do I do if I find a dead bird(s) around my home?

If you find a dead bird(s), please report it to www.wildflorida.org/bird/; or call the Miami-Dade County Health Department, Office of Environmental Health at (305) 623 3574 (Monday through Friday 8:00-5:00p.m.). During nights, weekends, or holidays, please call (305) 377-6751.

If you have questions or need more information about the West Nile virus, please call the Miami-Dade County Health Department, Office of Epidemiology and Disease Control at (305) 470-5660 (Monday through Friday 8:00-5:00p.m.). During nights, weekends, or holidays, please call (305) 324-2400.