

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is carried by mosquitoes. It can cause disease (West Nile infection) in humans, birds, horses, and some other mammals. Most cases of West Nile virus in the United States occur June through September.

How is West Nile virus spread?

West Nile virus is mainly transmitted to people through the bites of infected mosquitoes. Rarely, people can be infected through blood transfusions. Blood banks screen donors to make sure the blood does not contain West Nile virus. You can't get infected from casual contact with an infected person or animal.

What are the signs and symptoms of West Nile virus?

Most people infected with West Nile virus either don't develop signs or symptoms or have only minor ones, such as fever and mild headache, body aches, joint pains, nausea, and vomiting. Mild signs and symptoms of a West Nile virus infection generally go away on their own. But severe signs and symptoms — such as a severe headache, fever, disorientation or sudden weakness — require immediate attention.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms range from 2 to 14 days after exposure, and can be several weeks in people with weakened immune systems.

Most people with West Nile virus disease recover completely, but fatigue and weakness can last for weeks or months.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone who is bitten by an infected mosquito can get the disease. People over the age of 60, people with certain medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease, and people who have received organ transplants, or those with poor immune systems are more likely to develop a serious illness if infected.

What type of health problems are caused by West Nile virus?

Some people develop a life-threatening illness that includes inflammation of the spinal cord or brain. Symptoms of severe illness include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. Some effects to the central nervous system might be permanent.

About 1 out of 10 people who develop severe illness affecting the central nervous system die.

The virus can cause severe disease and death in horses. Vaccines are available for use in horses, but not for people.

How is West Nile virus diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider can order tests to look for West Nile virus infection.

How is West Nile virus treated?

No vaccine or specific antiviral treatments for West Nile virus infection are available.

Over-the-counter pain relievers can be used to reduce fever and relieve some symptoms. In severe cases, patients often need to be hospitalized to receive supportive treatment. If you think you or a family member might have West Nile virus disease, talk with your healthcare provider.

How can West Nile virus be prevented?

Your best bet for preventing West Nile virus and other mosquito-borne illnesses is to avoid exposure to mosquitoes and eliminate standing water, where mosquitoes breed.

- Unclog roof gutters.
- Empty unused swimming pools or empty standing water on pool covers.
- Change water in birdbaths and pet bowls regularly.
- Remove old tires or unused containers that might hold water and serve as a breeding place for mosquitoes.
- Install or repair screens on windows and doors.
- Clean and stock garden ponds with mosquito-eating fish or mosquito dunks.

To reduce your exposure to mosquitoes:

- Avoid unnecessary outdoor activity when mosquitoes are most active, such as at dawn, dusk and early evening.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors.
- Apply mosquito repellent containing an Environmental Protection Agency-registered insect repellent to your skin and clothing. Choose the concentration based on the hours of protection you need — the higher the percentage (concentration) of the active ingredient, the longer the repellent will work. Follow the directions on the package, paying special attention to recommendations for use on children.
- Protect infants and small children when they are outdoors.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)
- [Environmental Protection Agency](#)
- [National Pesticide Information Center](#)
- [Utah Department of Health](#)

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