

# West Nile Virus

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1 WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS?

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne infection that can cause serious illness. Although chances of a person getting sick are small, there are some simple steps you can take to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes.

### 2 WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF WEST NILE VIRUS?

Mild cases of West Nile infections may include a slight fever and/or headache. More severe infections are marked by a rapid onset of a high fever with head and body aches, disorientation, tremors, convulsions and, in the most severe cases, paralysis or death. Usually symptoms occur from 5 to 15 days after exposure. There is no specific treatment for viral infections, other than to treat the symptoms and provide supportive care.

### 3 WHO IS AT HIGHEST RISK FOR BECOMING SERIOUSLY ILL?

Persons who are at highest risk for serious illness are persons over the age of 50. Healthy children and adults are at very low risk for infection.

### 4 DO ALL MOSQUITOES TRANSMIT DISEASE?

No. Most mosquitoes do not transmit disease. While there are about 65 different species of mosquitoes in New York State, only certain species have been associated with West Nile virus in New York State.

### 5 WHERE DO MOSQUITOES LIVE AND BREED?

Mosquitoes lay their eggs in moist areas, such as standing water. The eggs become larva that remain in the water until the adults mature and fly off. Weeds, tall grass and shrubbery provide an outdoor home for adult mosquitoes. They can also enter houses through unscreened windows or doors, or broken screens. Many mosquitoes will breed in containers that hold water, such as flower pots or discarded tires.

### 6 WHEN ARE MOSQUITOES MOST ACTIVE?

Some mosquitoes are most active between dusk and dawn, when the air is calm. However, others will feed at any time of day.

### 7 WHAT BIRD(S) CAN CARRY WEST NILE VIRUS?

In New York State, most West Nile virus-positive birds have been American crows. The State Health Department is using dead crow sightings to track West Nile virus, so it's important to report any dead crows to your local health department. Not all dead crows need to be tested for West Nile virus. There is no evidence that birds can transmit West Nile virus to people, but gloves should be worn when handling any dead bird or mammal because of the possibility of other diseases.

### 8 CAN MY PET BE INFECTED?

West Nile virus has been confirmed in some domestic animals, including pet birds, dogs and cats. Horses can become seriously ill, if infected. It is important to remember that birds and animals cannot transmit West Nile virus to people.

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## 9 HOW CAN I PROTECT MY FAMILY AND MYSELF?

To reduce the mosquito population around your home and property, reduce or eliminate all standing water:

- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers.
- Remove all discarded tires on your property. Used tires are very significant mosquito breeding sites.
- 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.
- Remove leaf debris.
- 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.

## 10 SHOULD WE STAY INDOORS?

It is not necessary to limit any outdoor activities. However, you can and should try to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes. In addition to reducing standing water in your yard, make sure all windows and doors have screens, and that all screens are in good repair. If West Nile virus is found in your area:

- Wear shoes, socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors for long periods of time, or when mosquitoes are most active.
- Consider the use of mosquito repellent, according to directions, when it is necessary to be outdoors when mosquitoes are biting.

## 11 WHAT IS BEING DONE IN MY COMMUNITY TO CONTROL MOSQUITOES?

The New York State Health Department, along with other state agencies, local health departments, colleges and environmental groups, has prepared a plan to address the return of West Nile virus to the Empire State, and has devised a preventive strategy to minimize the impact. Local communities are implementing various control measures based on geographic location and level of risk. For more information regarding activities in your specific area, contact your local health department.

## 12 WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

In addition to reducing potential breeding sites on your own property, you can encourage your neighbors, local businesses and municipal agencies to do so as well. You can also work with local service, labor, religious and fraternal organizations to promote community-wide clean-up drives. For more information on how you can help, contact your local health department or write:





The Broome County Health Department is using dead crow sightings and laboratory testing of crows to help track West Nile Virus. If you see a dead crow, contact the Broome County Health Department Division of Environmental Health at 607.778.2887, Option 1. Not all dead crows will be picked up or tested. If the crow has not been picked up within 36 hours, you may discard the crow.

For more information on West Nile Virus, visit the Broome County Government web site at: [www.gobroomecounty.com](http://www.gobroomecounty.com) or call the West Nile Virus Information Line at: 607.778.3911, Option 4.