



West Nile Virus

Frequently Asked Questions

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is a mosquito borne flavivirus. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Subsequently, infected mosquitoes can transmit the virus to humans and other animals.

What is the incubation period in humans?

Usually 3 days to two weeks.

What are the symptoms associated with West Nile Virus?

Most people who are infected with the West Nile virus will have no symptoms. About 20% of those who become infected will develop a mild febrile illness (West Nile fever), which signs and symptoms include fever, headache, and body aches, occasionally with a skin rash on the trunk of the body and swollen lymph glands. Severe infection (West Nile encephalitis or meningitis) may present with headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis. It is estimated that 1 in 150 persons infected with the West Nile virus will develop a more severe form of disease.

How long do symptoms last?

Symptoms of mild disease will generally last a few days. Symptoms of severe disease may last several weeks, although neurological effects may be permanent.

Who is at risk of developing clinical disease?

Residents in areas in which West Nile virus activity has been identified are at risk. Persons older than 50 years are at greater risk of severe disease. Encephalitis is more commonly reported than meningitis in patients with severe neurological disease.

What can I do to reduce my risk of becoming infected with West Nile virus?

- Avoid outside activity at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active. This is particularly important for the elderly and small children.
- Wear protective clothing (long pants and long sleeves) and apply insect repellent when outside.
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes in them.
- Drain all standing water on private property and stock permanent ponds with fish that eat mosquito larvae.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly. Clean gutters in the spring and fall.

Is there a vaccine against West Nile encephalitis for humans?

No, but several companies are working towards developing a vaccine.

What should I do if I think I am infected?

Remember that less than 1% of persons infected with the virus will develop severe illness. However, if you think you have contracted West Nile virus and are experiencing symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness and severe headaches, **you should see your health care provider.**

How do health care providers test for West Nile virus infection?

Your physician will first take a medical history to assess your risk for West Nile virus. If your physician determines that you are at high risk and have symptoms of West Nile virus, your provider will usually draw a blood sample and send it to a commercial or public health laboratory for testing and confirmation.

How is West Nile virus treated?

There is currently no specific treatment for West Nile virus infection. For more severe cases, supportive care may be indicated. More severe cases often require hospitalization.

How can I report dead bird(s) sightings in my area?

San Diego County is currently testing selected dead birds found for West Nile virus. If you find a dead bird, please notify the Department of Environmental Health, Vector Surveillance and Control, immediately at **1-888-551-INFO (4636)** or **(858) 694-2888** to alert vector staff for bird collection. For more information about the Dead Bird Surveillance Program, please go to http://www.sdfightthebite.com/#dead_birds.