

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus is responsible for the infection known as West Nile Fever. West Nile Virus is transmitted through bites by mosquitoes which have become infected carriers after biting infected birds. Most people infected with West Nile Virus will not get sick at all. About 20% of those infected will have mild flu-like symptoms which may include fever, headache and body aches, a rash on the trunk of the body and swollen lymph glands lasting a week or less. In rare cases (less than 1%) West Nile Virus infection can result in serious health effects such as meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain) or encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). People with this more serious illness may have fever, headache, confusion, weakness, and, occasionally, paralysis.

How likely am I to get sick from a mosquito bite?

Even in areas where mosquitoes do carry the virus, very few mosquitoes – much less than 1% – are infected. If the mosquito is infected, less than 1% of people who get bitten and become infected will get severely ill. *The chance you will become severely ill from any one mosquito bite is extremely small.*

How can I protect myself?

While the risk of illness caused by West Nile Virus is low, British Columbian's should know how to prepare for and reduce their risk of infection. Any activity that either prevents mosquitoes from biting or prevents mosquitoes from breeding will help to further reduce the risk of infection. There are many simple things that you can do to protect yourself from West Nile Virus:

- ***Wear protective clothing*** – Avoid dark clothing as it tends to attract mosquitoes. When in mosquito infested areas, wear loose-fitting, full-length pant legs and long sleeves to act as barriers against mosquito biting.
- ***Use mosquito repellent*** – West Nile Virus has been found in both daytime and dusk-to-dawn biting mosquitoes. For this reason, use of a mosquito repellent containing DEET to areas of exposed skin is best. The amount of DEET in repellents should not exceed 30% for adults and 10% for children. DEET should not be used on children under 6 months of age. Check the product label for instructions on proper use.
- ***Install mosquito screens on windows*** – If in a mosquito infested area, remain in well-screened or completely enclosed, air-conditioned areas when possible. Consider staying indoors at dawn, dusk and in the early evening, which are peak mosquito biting times.
- ***Prevent mosquito breeding around your home*** – It doesn't take much time or water, for mosquitoes to develop from eggs to adults. Therefore, anything that can hold water is a likely breeding spot. Try to recognize and get rid of these areas on your property. A few things to do include: empty saucers under flowerpots, change water in bird baths regularly, unclog rain gutters, drain tarps, tires, and other debris where rain water may collect and install a pump in ornamental ponds or stock them with fish.

If you are concerned you have symptoms of West Nile Virus, or may have been bitten by an infected mosquito, call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse anytime of the day or night at:

- Within Greater Vancouver: (604) 215-4700
- Toll-free elsewhere within B.C.: 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired toll-free throughout B.C. 1-866-889-4700

For more information on the West Nile Virus, visit the Interior Health website at www.interiorhealth.ca or call 1-866-300-0520 to report **fresh** dead crows, ravens, magpies, or jays, with no sign of injury.

TIPS FOR CONTROLLING MOSQUITOES AROUND YOUR HOME

- Dispose of, turn upside down, or drill holes in tin cans, plastic containers, old flower-pots or similar water-holding containers.
- Empty or drill holes in discarded tires.
- Change water in birdbaths twice a week.
- Cover rainwater barrels with mesh or screens.
- Don't allow water to stand for more than 3 days.
- Clean, chlorinate, and circulate outdoor pools and hot tubs.
- Remove water that collects on pool covers.
- Turn over wading pools and wheelbarrows.
- Aerate ornamental pools, stock them with fish, or change water twice a week.
- Clear leaves and twigs from eaves troughs, storm and roof gutters throughout the summer.
- Make sure drain ditches are not clogged.
- Check flat roofs frequently for standing water.
- Turn over compost frequently.
- Fill in low depressions in lawns.
- Clear out dense vegetation and long grasses where mosquitoes like to breed and eliminate decaying debris.
- Provide snug fitting screens, with no holes, for windows and doors.
- Point out potential mosquito breeding areas to your neighbours.
- Add 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil to any standing water as this will not allow the mosquito larvae to hatch therefore eliminating breeding and it will not harm any animals.