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# West Nile Virus Fact Sheet

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## ***What is West Nile virus infection?***

West Nile virus infection is a mosquito-borne disease. The virus was first isolated in the United States in 1999, when an outbreak occurred in New York City. More than 200 cases have been reported since West Nile virus was first detected in Florida in 2001.

## ***Who gets West Nile virus infection?***

People may get the virus by being bitten by infected mosquitoes. People over the age of 50 and people with weakened immune systems are at a higher risk for developing a more serious infection.

## ***What parts of the State of Florida are most at risk?***

West Nile virus occurs throughout the state.

## ***How is West Nile virus spread?***

West Nile virus is maintained in a bird-mosquito cycle. Mosquitoes become infected when they bite a bird that is carrying the virus. Sometimes an infected mosquito will bite a person or an animal instead of a bird. West Nile virus is not spread from person to person or from animals to people.

## ***What are the symptoms?***

Symptoms appear between 2 and 15 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. Most people who are infected do not develop any symptoms or they develop a mild illness that may include fever, muscle aches and sometimes a skin rash. A small number of people may develop a more serious infection, West Nile meningitis and encephalitis. These illnesses are usually characterized by the acute onset of fever with stiff neck, altered mental status, seizures and limb weakness. Meningitis and encephalitis can progress to coma and death.

## ***How is it treated?***

There is no specific treatment and most cases will recover on their own. Treatment is supportive, attempting to deal with problems such as swelling of the brain, respiratory paralysis and other treatable complications. There are currently no commercially available human vaccines for the West Nile virus disease.

## ***I've been bitten by a mosquito, should I be tested for West Nile virus?***

No, most mosquitoes are not infected with the virus. If you have symptoms of the disease, you should contact a physician.

## ***Can pets and livestock develop West Nile virus infection?***

Yes, pets and livestock can develop the disease. Like people, infected animals may not develop any symptoms or they will develop a mild illness. A small number of animals may develop a more serious infection. The disease is mostly seen in wild birds and horses, but other animals have developed the disease.

### ***What are the symptoms in animals?***

Sick animals may have a fever, weakness, difficulties with coordination, muscle spasms and other symptoms related to neurologic disease.

### ***What should I do if I suspect my pet has West Nile virus infection?***

If your pet is sick, contact your veterinarian.

### ***How are pets treated for West Nile virus infection?***

There is no specific treatment and most pets will make a full recovery.

### ***What should I do if I find a dead bird?***

Dead birds may be an indicator that West Nile virus is in your area. If you find a dead bird that appears to have died of natural causes, report it to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's wild bird mortality database <http://www.MyFWC.com/bird/>. Do not handle dead birds unless it is necessary. If you must handle a dead bird, wear rubber gloves or use double plastic bags.

### ***What can be done to prevent West Nile virus infection?***

Prevention is the key. The best way to avoid infection is to avoid getting mosquito bites. Remember "**Drain and Cover**

#### **Drain standing water to stop mosquitoes from multiplying**

- Drain water from garbage cans, house gutters, buckets, pool covers, coolers, toys, flower pots or any other containers where sprinkler or rain water has collected.
- Discard old tires, drums, bottles, cans, pots and pans, broken appliances and other items that aren't being used.
- Empty and clean birdbaths and pet's water bowls at least once or twice a week.
- Protect boats and vehicles from rain with tarps that don't accumulate water.
- Maintain swimming pools in good condition and appropriately chlorinated. Empty plastic swimming pools when not in use.

#### **Cover skin with clothing or repellent**

- CLOTHING - Wear shoes, socks, and long pants and long-sleeves. This type of protection may be necessary for people who must work in areas where mosquitoes are present.
- REPELLENT - Apply mosquito repellent to bare skin and clothing.
  - Always use repellents according to the label. Repellents with DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, and IR3535 are effective.
  - Use mosquito netting to protect children younger than 2 months old.

#### **Cover doors and windows with screens to keep mosquitoes out of your house**

- Repair broken screening on windows, doors, porches, and patios.

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***For additional information on West Nile virus contact:***

**Duval County Health Department, Epidemiology Program, MC-28  
515 West Sixth Street  
Jacksonville, FL 32206  
(904) 253-1850**