



Do You Know...about West Nile Virus

West Nile Virus causes encephalitis, or inflammation of the brain. It is commonly found in Africa, West Asia and the Middle East but has been found in the US only since about 1999.

It is likely that the virus can infect any warm-blooded animal. It has been confirmed in horses, dogs, cats, black bears, over 200 species of birds and, of course, people. It is transmitted, usually, by mosquitoes although there is a suspicion that other blood sucking insects may also spread the disease, at least among birds. To date, there is no indication that the disease can be spread from bird/animal to bird/animal, bird/animal to person, or person to person, meaning, if you find a hurt animal, there are no additional precautions you need to take when handling it.

In most healthy people, symptoms of West Nile are mild and may resemble a flu; you may even have had the virus and not known it. A more severe infection is possible, especially in people that are already compromised by other illness or age. West Nile has caused fatalities (3% to 15%) in people. Among birds, it is almost 100% fatal, especially in crows. A few birds of prey, i.e., hawks, owls, have "recovered" with good supportive care but most have remained unreleasable due to brain damage. If you believe you may have contracted West Nile Virus, you should contact your doctor. Currently, the only vaccine against West Nile has been developed for horses. There is no vaccine available for people and the horse vaccine is not known to be effective in other animals. Rest assured that the scientific community is putting in long hours trying to find a vaccine. There also is no real treatment for the illness other than good supportive care including hospitalization, intravenous fluids and nutrition, airway management, ventilatory support (ventilator) if needed, and prevention of secondary infections such as pneumonia, urinary tract, etc. And, of course, there's nothing like a lot of TLC through good nursing care.

Currently, there are more questions than answers about West Nile Virus. It is believed that the incubation period in people is usually 5 to 15 days but that is a pretty wide spread. The most common vector for West Nile is the mosquito, specifically *Culex pipiens*. This is a common mosquito in Maryland and is known to be a weak flyer. It has a maximum flight range of about a mile on a hot day—less in cooler weather. It is most active at dawn and dusk. The "Asian Tiger" mosquito, a non-native, also spreads West Nile, has been found in Maryland and is, unfortunately, active all day. Asian Tigers are also very weak flyers so, if you are pestered by mosquitoes during the summer months, it is likely they are breeding and reproducing on or near your property. On the plus side, during cold weather mosquitoes become dormant. We shouldn't have to worry about anyone or anything coming down with West Nile again until Spring 2003.

It appears that West Nile Virus is here to stay. When the snow and cold of winter gives way to the gentle breezes of spring and summer, what can you do to protect yourself? First, like all viruses, if you contract it once, your body will produce antibodies that will provide immunity from future infections. To prevent becoming infected at all, stay indoors at dawn, dusk and early evening. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors. Use an insect repellent containing 20% to 30% DEET, sparingly spraying both bare skin and clothing. More importantly, remember that mosquitoes are NOT long distance flyers; if you have a heavy mosquito infestation, they are breeding in or near your yard. The Asian Tiger, in particular, does not breed in ponds; rather, it favors small pools of standing water. Check your property for anything that might accumulate and hold water; flower pot saucers, old tires, buckets, wheel barrows and don't forget your house gutters, keep them clean and free of standing water. Encourage your neighbors to do the same.

The State Health Department no longer picks up dead birds that may have succumbed to West Nile Virus. Their original purpose was to determine the spread of the virus and it has been determined that it pretty much covers all of Maryland. In fact, there are only a few western states where it has not been found, yet, and that will probably change when mosquito season arrives again. If you find a dead bird, you may either bury it, place it out in the woods, or wrap it in newspaper (using gloves) and place it in your trash.

There are several websites that can provide more information.
www.mda.state.md.us – Maryland Department of Agriculture
www.edcp.org – Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
www.cdc.gov – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.mosquito.askdep.com – joint West Nile Virus Information site of Montgomery County Departments of Environmental Protection and Health and Human Services.

Now You Know!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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