



ALAMEDA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

WEST NILE VIRUS FACT SHEET

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a disease that is spread by mosquitoes. WNV first appeared in the United States in 1999. Since then, it has spread across the United States and now is a seasonal (June 1 – November 1) health threat, particularly during the height of the mosquito season.

What are the symptoms of West Nile Virus?

Approximately 80 percent of people who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all, but there is no way to know in advance if who will become sick. Up to 20 percent of people who become infected with WNV will have mild symptoms: fever, headache and body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes a skin rash and swollen lymph glands.

About 1 in 150 people with WNV infection will have severe symptoms: high fever, headache, neck stiffness, disorientation, convulsions, muscle weakness, coma, and paralysis. This severe form of the disease may last several weeks and some nervous system effects may be permanent.

How is the West Nile Virus spread?

Birds are the main carriers of WNV. When a mosquito bites an infected bird, the mosquito can then spread the virus by biting another bird or a human. In a small number of cases, WNV has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants and breastfeeding. WNV is not spread through casual contact (e.g. touching, kissing).

How is West Nile Virus treated?

There is no specific treatment for WNV. Mild symptoms may end on their own. The more severe forms of the illness usually require hospitalization.

How can you protect yourself against WNV?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following steps to reduce your West Nile Virus risk:

1. Avoid mosquito bites

- **Spray.** Use insect repellent with DEET on exposed skin when you go outdoors. Be sure to read and follow the DIRECTIONS FOR USE, especially when using on children.

- **Cover up.** Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks while outdoors.
- **Avoid mosquitoes.** Many mosquitoes bite during dusk and dawn. Limit time outdoors during these hours. Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks when outdoors.

2. Mosquito-proof your home

- **Repair screens.** Keep mosquitoes outside by repairing holes in window and door screens.
- **Drain standing water.** Any small amount of standing water can be enough for a mosquito to lay eggs.
- **Get rid of breeding sites.** Empty water from buckets, cans, pool covers, flowerpots, birdbaths and other items. Throw away or cover up stored tires. Clean pet or livestock bowls weekly. Check for clogged rain gutters.

3. Help your community

- **Report dead birds.** Dead birds can help identify if WNV is present. Call the Vector Control District to report the location of a dead bird – particularly a crow, jay, magpie or raven.
- **Identify standing water.** Encourage your neighbors to empty standing water. Notify the Vector Control District to report neglected pools, ponds or other standing water.

4. Report a dead bird

- Alameda County Mosquito Abatement District: 510 783-7744
- Vector Control (City of Albany only): 510 567.7800
- State of California: 877-WNV-BIRD (1-877-968-2473) or go online: http://www.westnile.ca.gov/report_wnv.php

Want more information?

- Mosquito Abatement: <http://www.mosquitoes.org/>
- Vector Control: http://www.acvcso.org/west_niles_virus/information.htm
- California WNV: <http://www.westnile.ca.gov/>
- Centers for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>