

## WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS ?

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) in humans and other animals. The virus is named after the West Nile region of Uganda where it was first isolated in 1937. The virus appeared for the first time in the United States during a 1999 outbreak in New York that killed seven people. The first human case of the virus in Virginia appeared in 2002.

## HOW IS WEST NILE VIRUS SPREAD ?

West Nile virus is almost always spread to humans, birds and other animals through the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that is carrying the virus.

West Nile virus is not spread from person to person, but a small number of cases were a result of blood transfusions or organ transplants from infected people. There may also be a risk of infected mothers transmitting the virus to their unborn or nursing children.



## WHAT ARE MY CHANCES OF GETTING WEST NILE VIRUS ?

In areas where West Nile virus has been detected, only a small proportion of mosquitoes are likely to be infected. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito do not become sick.

Less than 1% of people who are infected will become seriously ill.

10-15 percent of those seriously ill die.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS ?

The symptoms generally appear about 3-14 days after exposure. People over age 50 are at greater risk of severe illness.

Milder symptoms include:

- slight fever
- headache
- body aches
- swollen glands
- sometimes a skin rash

Severe symptoms include:

- high fever
- intense headache
- stiff headache
- confusion

Most people bitten by a mosquito infected with West Nile virus do not get sick.

## WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I HAVE WEST NILE VIRUS ?

If you are bitten by a mosquito, you don't need to see a doctor. Most people who suffer a mild illness due to West Nile virus recover, and no treatment is necessary. Only supportive treatment is available for more serious cases. Testing for West Nile virus in people involves a blood or spinal fluid test that can take several weeks to confirm. No vaccine exists at this time for West Nile virus.

## PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH

The Virginia Department of Health, along with multiple other agencies, is monitoring for mosquito-borne viruses in mosquitoes, horses and humans. The information collected is used to advise local authorities and the public about the potential threat of West Nile virus in Virginia.

## REPORTING DEAD BIRDS

The Virginia Department of Health will not provide WNV testing for wild birds during the 2008 season.

Henrico's Standing Water Initiative has used dead bird reporting as a guidance tool for adult mosquito surveillance in the past. The Standing Water Initiative will continue to document reports of dead birds through phone reports and GIS mapping of those reports but will no longer collect dead birds for WNV testing.