



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...West Nile Virus

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is a virus that is spread by mosquitoes. This virus may cause severe illness in people.

What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?

Most people who get West Nile virus will have no signs or mild illness. A few individuals will have a more severe form of the disease; swelling of the brain or the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord. Signs may be high fever, headache, neck stiffness, muscle weakness, and being confused.

West Nile virus has been found in people 9 months old to 94 years old, but severe disease is most likely in people over 50 years of age, or those with weak immune systems.

How is West Nile virus spread?

Mosquitoes spread the disease to humans by biting a bird with the virus, and then biting a human. Humans that are bitten by a mosquito with the virus may show signs 3 to 15 days after being bitten.

Who is at risk for getting West Nile virus?

Anyone who gets a mosquito bite is at risk of getting West Nile fever; people over 50 years of age have the highest risk of getting severe disease.

How do I know if I have West Nile virus?

You cannot tell without seeing your doctor. Your doctor will complete an exam and lab testing to see if you have West Nile virus.

How is West Nile virus treated?

West Nile virus cannot be treated but care can be given to people with severe illness.

How is West Nile virus prevented?

The spread of West Nile virus can be stopped when you prevent mosquito bites. Don't go outdoors during prime biting times, particularly dusk to dawn. If you have to be outdoors during these times, put on bug spray containing DEET, and wear shirts with long sleeves and pants. You can also protect your family by removing any amount of standing water in or near your home.

- Throw away old tires, tin cans, plastic bowls, ceramic pots, or other unused items that can hold water;
- Repair failed septic systems;
- Drill holes in the bottom of recycling tubs left outdoors;
- Keep grass cut short and shrubs trimmed;
- Clean clogged roof gutters;
- Flush fountains and birdbaths once a week; and
- Aerate ornamental pools, or stock them with fish.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>

This page was last reviewed June 20, 2015.