



WEST NILE VIRUS

Information for Seniors

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne infection that was first isolated in Africa in 1937. The virus is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected by biting an infected bird.

How serious is WNV?

Research indicates that about one out of five people who are infected with WNV will develop symptoms. Most people who are infected have either no symptoms or a mild illness. In about one per cent of infected individuals, WNV can cause severe illness resulting in hospitalization. The disease is rarely fatal. Some people (even with milder illness) find that it can take months to feel well again after being infected with WNV.

Who is at greater risk for WNV infection?

People of any age or health status are at risk of developing serious health effects from West Nile Virus, but the overall risk of serious health effects increases with age.

You are at greater risk for serious health effects from West Nile Virus if:

- You have a chronic diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, alcoholism, or heart disease
- You require medical treatment that may weaken the immune system, e.g. chemotherapy

What are the symptoms of WNV?

In humans, most WNV infections result in no symptoms. In those who do become ill, symptoms such as fever, extreme tiredness, frontal headache, muscle aches, and skin rash are most common. More serious symptoms can include neck stiffness, muscle weakness, and confusion. The time between infection and the onset of symptoms, called the incubation period, is between three and 15 days.

If you have concerns or you are feeling very sick, you should seek medical attention. Extreme swelling or infection at the site of the mosquito bite is another reason to seek medical help but it does not mean you have WNV.

How do people get WNV?

People become infected with the virus through a bite of infected mosquito. WNV is not spread through person-to-person contact such as touching or through coughing, sneezing or drinking from a shared cup.

In rare cases, WNV can be transmitted through blood transfusion and organ transplants if the donor was recently infected with WNV.

How can seniors protect themselves against the WNV?

- Avoid areas with large numbers of mosquitoes.
- Consider staying indoors from dusk to dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear light-coloured clothing, including long sleeves, long pants, socks and a hat **whenever you are outdoors** (even when you are in your back yard) especially from dusk to dawn.
- Check all window and door screens in your home to ensure there are no tears or holes for mosquitoes to get through.
- **Use insect repellent**
 - Only use insect repellents that are registered in Canada. There are numerous products on the market including ones that contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) and others that are DEET-free. If you use a product that contains DEET, Health Canada recommends that it contain less than 30 per cent DEET for adults and less than 10 per cent DEET for children. Read the labels carefully to determine if it is the right product for you.
 - **Always** read and follow the directions on the product label.
 - Apply insect repellent sparingly on exposed skin and on the surface of thin clothing. There is no need to apply repellent to skin under clothing.
 - Do not use insect repellent on open wounds or irritated or sunburned skin.
 - Do not get insect repellent in your eyes. If this happens, rinse with water right away.
 - Avoid breathing mist from spray-type repellents. Apply in a well-ventilated area. Do not spray near food. Never apply spray inside a tent.
 - Do not eat, drink or smoke while applying an insect repellent. Wash treated skin with soap and water when you return indoors or when protection is no longer needed.
 - If you suspect that you are reacting to an insect repellent, stop using the product immediately, wash treated skin and seek medical attention. When you go to the doctor, take the product container with you.
 - Keep all insect repellent out of the reach of children.

It is important to choose a repellent that you are likely to use consistently and that will provide sufficient protection for the amount of time that you will be outdoors.

What is the Region of Peel doing about WNV?

The Region of Peel has developed a Vector-Borne Disease Prevention Plan. Activities outlined in the WNV component of the plan include public education, monitoring for WNV in people and the environment and implementing measures to reduce mosquito breeding. The plan is available at www.peel-bugbite.ca.

For more information about WNV and the Region of Peel's Vector-Borne Disease Prevention Plan, call **905-799-7700, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday. Caledon residents call toll-free at 905-584-2216.**