

## **WEST NILE VIRUS**

### **Outdoor Workers**

#### **How can I protect myself from being infected with West Nile Virus when working outdoors?**

West Nile Virus (WNV) is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. You can reduce your risk of contracting the disease by reducing mosquito bites.

Mosquitoes are most active between April and October, during evening, night time, and dawn hours, but they may be present at any time of the day. If you work outside from dusk to dawn when mosquitoes are most active or during the day in a shaded area (e.g. woods) take the following precautions:

#### **Using Insect Repellent**

- Spray clothing with insect repellent that is registered for use in Canada to ward off mosquitoes that may bite through thin clothing. Store insect repellents out of reach of children.
- Apply repellent sparingly to exposed skin and follow the manufacturer's directions for use. Do not get insect repellent in your eyes. If this happens, rinse with water right away. Do not apply to cuts, wounds, irritated or sunburned skin.
- Avoid prolonged or excessive use of insect repellents. Wash all treated skin and clothing with soap and water after returning indoors. Wash your hands before eating.
- Avoid breathing mist from spray-type repellent. Always apply it in a well ventilated area. Do not apply repellent inside a tent or near food.
- Check for sensitivity by applying repellent to a small area of skin on the arm and wait for 24 hours before use.

#### **What are the guidelines for using both sunscreen and insect repellent at the same time?**

The best strategy is to apply sunscreen 20 minutes before outdoor activities and then apply insect repellent after the 20 minute period. If combination sunscreen and DEET products are used, they should be used **solely as an insect repellent**. Combination products have incompatible instructions for application. Insect repellents should be applied sparingly and sunscreens should be applied liberally for optimum protection.

**Note:** There is no indication that there is a hazard to the unborn or nursing child associated with the use of DEET products by pregnant or breastfeeding women. However, there are non-chemical methods to reduce mosquito bites (e.g., protective clothing, avoiding mosquito habitats and times of peak mosquito activity) which could be considered if you prefer an alternative to DEET.

## **How can I avoid heat stress on hot, humid days?**

If you wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, shoes and socks to reduce the risk of mosquito bites, you might be at greater risk for heat stress on hot, humid days. To avoid symptoms of heat stress, you should:

- Wear light-coloured, breathable clothing that allows moisture to evaporate quickly.
- Use extra caution if you are required to wear clothing on the job that limits evaporation - you could develop heat stress much more quickly.
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic and non-caffeine liquids to maintain body hydration.

## **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](http://www.peel-bugbite.ca).

## **Where can I find more information about WNV?**

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.**

**[peel-bugbite.ca](http://peel-bugbite.ca)**