

# West Nile Virus

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus is a viral infection that is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes get infected with the West Nile Virus by feeding on infected birds. The infected mosquitoes then spread the virus by biting humans and other animals, such as horses. West Nile Virus is seen most often during the summer and early fall months.



### Who gets West Nile Virus and how?

The virus can affect anyone bitten by an infected mosquito. People over the age of 50 and people with weak immune systems are at greater risk of developing severe illness.

### How is it diagnosed?

Health care provider will examine samples of patient's blood or spinal fluid.

### What are the symptoms?

Many people infected with West Nile Virus do not become ill and develop symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they may be mild or severe and show up 3 to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

- **Mild symptoms:** flu-like illness with fever, headache, body aches, nausea and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back.
- **Severe symptoms:** high fever, neck stiffness and swelling of the brain (encephalitis) which can lead to coma, convulsions and death. Less than 1% of infected people will develop severe symptoms.

### What is the treatment for West Nile Virus?

There is no specific treatment for West Nile Virus. Most people with West Nile fever will recover in approximately seven days. Most treatment focuses on supportive therapy to lower fever and ease pressure on the brain and spinal cord.



### Can people with West Nile Virus pass the illness to others?

The virus that causes West Nile Virus is spread only by mosquitoes. West Nile Virus is not spread from person to person. In rare cases, the virus has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and during pregnancy from mother to baby.

More information: [How to Prevent West Nile Virus \(pdf\)](#)