



What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is an infection spread by mosquitoes that - in a small number of cases - can cause serious illness.

Mosquitoes, especially those from the *Culex* genus, become infected after biting a bird with the virus. WNV is originally a bird virus and while the most severely affected species are corvids such as ravens, crows and blue jays, some common bird species such as house sparrows, the common grackle and American robins are also important in amplifying the spread of WNV to bird-feeding mosquitoes.

The virus is spread to humans after being bitten by a mosquito infected with WNV. Horses are also susceptible to WNV after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

Symptoms

Most people will not develop any symptoms if infected with WNV, but some may experience flu-like symptoms. The risk for more serious illness from WNV increases with increasing age, with older adults and the elderly as well as people with weakened immune systems being at higher risk. Symptoms may include:

- Flu-like symptoms, including, but not limited to, fever, frontal headache, muscle aches and occasionally a skin rash;
- Additional symptoms such as neck stiffness, muscle weakness, stupor, disorientation and coma.
- It can take between three and 14 days before symptoms occur after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

How to protect yourself from mosquito bites

Reduce your chance of infection from mosquitoes by doing the following:

- Apply an **approved mosquito repellent** containing “DEET” or “icaridin” to exposed skin and clothing.
- Wear light-coloured, tightly-woven but loose-fitting clothing—long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, socks and shoes; mosquitoes are attracted to darker colours and can still bite through thin, clingy clothing.
- Avoid outdoor activities during the hours between dusk and dawn—periods when mosquitoes are most active—and at any time in shady, wooded areas.
- Make sure all windows and doors in your home have well-fitting screens in good repair.

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Reduce mosquito populations:

Drain standing water at least once per week to get rid of mosquito breeding sites:

- Look around/outside your house for containers, receptacles and any other items that might collect water. Be sure to empty them at least once a week, turn them over or drill holes when appropriate, or dispose of them accordingly. For example:
 - » Plastic wading pools
 - » Wheelbarrows
 - » Pool covers
 - » Bird baths
 - » Tires
 - » Pans/saucers under potted plants
- Clean clogged roof gutters; remove leaves and debris that may prevent water drainage.
- Ensure all openings to rain barrels are covered with screen mesh at all times.
- Change the water in birdbaths at least once per week, aerate private ornamental ponds or treat them with an approved mosquito larvicide if they do not have an outflow into natural waters.
- Keep swimming pools clean and properly chlorinated.
- Drill holes in the bottom of recycling containers that are left outdoors so that water can drain out.
- Use landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property.
- If you have a backyard stormwater drain/sewer please call Ottawa Public Health to discuss treatment options.

For more information on West Nile virus, symptoms and when to contact a health care provider, call Ottawa Public Health at **613-580-6744** or visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/WestNileVirus