

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

West Nile Virus



Burlington County Health Department

Raphael Meadow Health Center
15 Pioneer Boulevard
P.O. Box 6000
Westampton, N.J. 08060
Phone: 609-265-5548 Fax: 609-265-3152



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Burlington County Health Department
Health Starts Here

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

West Nile virus is a virus most commonly spread by infected mosquitoes. Only about 1 in 5 people who are infected with WNV will develop some symptoms, and less than 1% of those infected will develop a serious illness.

What are the symptoms of WNV?

Most people (70-80%) who become infected with WNV do not develop any symptoms. About 1 in 5 people who are infected develop a fever with other symptoms such as headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea, or rash. Most people with this type of WNV recover completely. Severe symptoms only show in less than 1% of infected people and can cause serious neurological issues such as swelling of the brain or surrounding tissues and spinal cord.

Is there treatment for WNV?

There is no treatment or vaccine for WNV infection. Over-the-counter pain relievers can be used to reduce fever and relieve some symptoms. People with milder symptoms typically recover on their own, although some symptoms may last for several weeks. In more severe cases, patients often need to be hospitalized to receive supportive treatment, such as intravenous fluids, pain medication, and nursing care.

When and where do most WNV cases occur?

Most cases of WNV occur during the months of June through September. WNV has also been reported in all of the contiguous 48 states. The weather, numbers of birds that maintain the virus, numbers of mosquitoes that spread the virus, and human behavior are all factors that can influence when and where outbreaks occur.

How is WNV spread?

Most people get infected with West Nile virus by the bite of an infected mosquito. In a very small number of cases, West Nile virus has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, and from mother to baby during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.

If you notice a dead bird in your area, call the Burlington County Health Department at (609) 265-5533. While most dead birds will not be collected and tested for WNV, keeping track of their locations plays an important role in directing further bird, mosquito and human WNV surveillance activities.

West Nile Virus is **not** spread from person to person.

What can you do to prevent mosquito bites?

The best way to protect yourself is to keep mosquitoes from biting you. Follow these steps every summer to reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes.

- **Use repellent:** When outdoors, use insect repellent containing DEET on exposed skin and/or clothing. Mosquitos bite during the day and night so repellent should be used all day.
- **Wear protective clothing:** Wear long sleeves and pants when weather permits
- **Install and repair screens:** Have secure, intact screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitos out.
- **Keep mosquitos from laying eggs near you:** Mosquitos can lay eggs even in small amounts of standing water. Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets, barrels, and tires. Change water in pet dishes and replace with water in bird baths every few days. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out. Empty children's wading pools and store on their side after use.

Where can I get more information?

- Your primary care provider
- The Burlington County Health Department at (609)265-5548 or www.co.burlington.nj.us/health
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/westnile>
- The New Jersey Department of Health website <http://www.nj.gov/health>