

**What is West Nile virus?**

West Nile virus is a virus that may cause different types of disease, such as fevers or encephalitis (swelling of the brain). It is spread by mosquitoes that have the virus and then give it to humans by biting them.

Who is at risk for West Nile virus?

Anyone of all ages is at risk, but older adults are more likely to develop severe symptoms.

What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?

Most people who become infected will show no symptoms. If symptoms do appear, they usually are mild and include fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting and rash. More severe symptoms include confusion, convulsions, coma, paralysis or even death.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear five to 15 days after the bite of an infected mosquito.

How is West Nile virus spread?

It is spread through the bite of an infected mosquito. On rare occasions, people can be infected through blood transfusions or receipt of an infected organ. Since the discovery of West Nile in the United States, new tests have been developed to reduce the risk of blood or organ exposure; as a result these infections are now very rare.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

People are not able to spread the disease to others. West Nile virus is spread by the bite of infected mosquitoes.

How is a person diagnosed?

A blood test can determine if you have been exposed to the virus.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus, and antibiotics will not work. However, health-care providers may offer supportive therapy (ie, rest, fluids) to help manage symptoms.

Does past infection make a person immune?

Yes. People build up immunity to West Nile virus. However, this virus is still new to the United States, so how long the immunity lasts is uncertain at this time.

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have West Nile virus?

No. Infants, toddlers and school-aged children should not be excluded unless the staff determines the child is unwilling or unable to participate in activities.

They also should be excluded if the staff determines that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.

All others can attend work and other functions as long as they are well enough to do so.

What can be done to prevent the spread of West Nile virus?

A person can prevent the spread of West Nile virus by trying to avoid mosquito bites. A person can do this by using insect repellent containing DEET; staying inside from dusk to dawn (if possible); checking windows to make sure there are no holes in the screens that allow mosquitoes to get indoors; and by emptying standing water from buckets, pet dishes, wading pools, flowerpots and other sources that can attract mosquitoes.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/wnv or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resource: American Academy of Pediatrics. Pickering LK, ed. *Red Book: 2003 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 26th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003:[126-129; 199-205]