

# Preventing and controlling West Nile Virus



# Contents

## West Nile Virus – Q & A

What is West Nile Virus? .....3  
How is it spread? .....4  
What are the symptoms?.....4  
How is it treated?.....5  
What can be done to prevent infection?....5

## Protect yourself and your family from West Nile Virus

Don't give mosquitoes a place to breed .....6  
Prevent mosquito bites.....8

## What are Clark and Skamania counties doing to reduce the risk of West Nile Virus? ..... 10

## Reporting dead birds..... 11

## For more information ..... 12

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# West Nile Virus – Q&A

## What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus is a mosquito-borne virus first found in the United States in 1999 when it caused illness in New York City. It is commonly found in west Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The virus can infect people, certain types of birds, mosquitoes, horses, and other animals. Only certain species of mosquito carry the virus.

Mosquito larvae





### **How is it spread?**

West Nile Virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. After 10 to 14 days, the infected mosquito can then transmit West Nile Virus to people and animals through its bite. West Nile Virus is not spread from person-to-person or animal-to-person contact. Routine screening of blood donations for West Nile Virus since 2003 has greatly reduced the risk of West Nile Virus infection through transfused blood.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Most people infected with West Nile Virus have no symptoms at all. About 20 percent develop symptoms that include fever, fatigue, headache, and muscle or joint pain. These symptoms can last a few days to several weeks. Less than 1 percent of infected people will develop a more serious illness with symptoms that include headache, high fever, stiff neck, disorientation, convulsions, tremors, and

muscle weakness. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your health care provider. Severe cases of the virus may lead to paralysis, coma, or death. Symptoms normally appear three to 15 days after the mosquito bite. People age 50 and older are more likely to develop severe symptoms from West Nile Virus.

### **How is it treated?**

There is no specific treatment for West Nile Virus infection. In more serious cases, treatment may involve hospitalization where patients can receive supportive treatment including intravenous fluids, respiratory support, prevention of secondary infections, and nursing care.

### **What can be done to prevent infection?**

Because there is currently no vaccine to protect humans from West Nile Virus, the best defense against the disease is to control mosquito populations, monitor for the presence of the virus, and prevent mosquito bites. The West Nile Virus vaccine that has been licensed for use in horses has yet to be fully evaluated and should not be used by humans.



## Protect yourself and your family from West Nile Virus

### Don't give mosquitoes a place to breed

Mosquitoes lay their eggs in slow-moving or standing water. Just a cup of water can breed over a thousand mosquitoes each week. From April to October, when mosquitoes are most active, take these steps to prevent mosquitoes from breeding:

- **Remove sources of standing water**, such as old tires, empty containers, pots, plastic ground covers, and anything else that holds water.
- **Change water** in bird baths, ponds, pet dishes, and animal troughs twice a week.
- **Repair leaking faucets and sprinklers.**



- **Clean clogged gutters.**
- **Cover trash containers** so they don't accumulate water.
- **Properly maintain and treat your pool.** Be sure pool covers do not hold pockets of water. Ornamental, self-contained ponds may be treated with larvicide to reduce mosquitoes. Follow label instructions and make sure it is for home use.
- **Organize neighborhood cleanup activities** to remove sources of standing water.



To report areas of standing water in Clark County, call the Clark County Mosquito Control 24-hour reporting line at (360) 397-8430 and press 1 at the recording. In Skamania County, call (509) 427-3871.

## Prevent mosquito bites

To reduce the risk of West Nile Virus, take the following safety measures to prevent mosquito bites:

- Use mosquito repellent when you are outdoors, especially at dawn, dusk, and early evening, when mosquitoes are most active. The most effective repellents contain the active ingredients DEET, Picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Permethrin is also an effective repellent but should be applied to clothing only, not directly on the skin.
- Use any repellent according to directions, especially when applying on children. Don't allow children to apply repellents themselves. For more information on mosquito repellents, visit the Centers for Disease Control Web site at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/mosquitorepellent.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/mosquitorepellent.htm).



- Install or repair screens on windows and doors so mosquitoes can't get inside.
- If possible, stay indoors during peak mosquito hours. But if being outside is irresistible on a warm summer evening, wear loose-fitting protective clothing – long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks, and hats, especially when going into woods or wetlands. If heat makes extra clothing uncomfortable, then be sure you've applied repellent thoroughly.
- Place mosquito netting over infant carriers when outdoors.

## What are Clark and Skamania counties doing to reduce the risk of West Nile Virus?

Clark and Skamania counties have developed comprehensive West Nile Virus response plans that include public education, habitat reduction, and mosquito surveillance and control activities.

From April 1 through October 1, the mosquito control crews identify and treat potential and actual mosquito breeding habitat. The priority is to treat mosquito larvae before they hatch. It is far more effective to kill larvae before they develop into flying insects than to fog large, open areas in attempt to eliminate adult mosquitoes. It is very difficult to reduce mosquito populations once they have spread from the breeding source.

Crews use biological control methods that have the least adverse impact on humans, wildlife, and the environment. Control measures used by the crew comply with state and federal regulations.



## Reporting dead birds

Because certain species of birds are highly susceptible to West Nile Virus, dead birds may indicate the presence of West Nile Virus in our community. The public is encouraged to report dead birds, especially crows and jays, which are most sensitive to the virus. To report a recently-dead bird in Clark County, call (360) 397-8482. In Skamania County, call (509) 427-3871.

Use caution, and avoid handling any dead bird with bare hands. Use gloves or a shovel to place the bird inside two plastic bags and keep it in a cool place while Public Health is notified.



## For more information

Visit the Clark County Public Health  
Web site at [www.clark.wa.gov/mosquito/  
westnile/](http://www.clark.wa.gov/mosquito/westnile/).



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