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West Nile Virus Frequently Asked Questions

What Is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) illness is a disease that can be spread to people and animals through the bite of an infected mosquito. The virus can cause potentially serious illness and even death in people. Experts believe WNV is well established in North America including Florida, with the most activity reported in the summer and fall months. This fact sheet contains important information that can help you prevent WNV illness.

What Can I Do to Prevent WNV?

The easiest and best way to avoid WNV illness is to prevent mosquito bites. The best preventive measures are to Drain standing water to prevent mosquito breeding around your home or business, Cover doors and windows to keep mosquitoes outside of homes and Cover skin with clothing or mosquito repellent to prevent mosquito bites.

DRAIN standing water:

- Drain water from garbage cans, buckets, pool covers, coolers, toys, flowerpots or any other containers where sprinkler or rainwater has collected.
- Discarded old tires, drums, bottles, cans, pots and pans, broken appliances and other items that aren't being used.
- Empty and clean birdbaths and pet's water bowls at least once or twice a week.
- Protect boats and vehicles from rain with tarps that don't accumulate water.
- Maintain swimming pools in good condition and appropriately chlorinated. Empty plastic swimming pools when not in use.

COVER your skin with:

- **CLOTHING** - If you must be outside when mosquitoes are active, cover up. Wear shoes, socks, long pants and long sleeves.
- **REPELLENT** - Apply mosquito repellent to exposed skin and clothing. Always use repellents according to the label. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered repellents with 10-30 percent DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and some oil of lemon eucalyptus and para-menthane-diol products provide longer-lasting protection. Permethrin repellent can also be applied to clothing (but not skin).
- Use mosquito netting to protect children younger than 2 months old.

COVER doors and windows with screens:

- Keep mosquitoes out of your house. Repair damaged screening on windows, doors, porches, and patios.

What Are the Symptoms of WNV?

- **Serious Symptoms.** About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent. Severe illness can also result in death.
- **Milder Symptoms.** Up to 20 percent of the people who become infected have symptoms such as fever, headache, and body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. Symptoms can last from a few days to several weeks.
- **No Symptoms.** Approximately 80 percent of people who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all.

How Does West Nile Virus Spread?

- Most often, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can then spread WNV to humans and other animals when they bite. WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.

How Soon Do Infected People Get Sick?

- People typically develop symptoms between two and 14 days after they are bitten by the infected mosquito.

How Is WNV Infection Treated?

- There is no specific treatment for WNV infection.
- In cases with milder symptoms, people experience symptoms such as fever and aches that pass on their own, although even healthy people have become sick for several weeks.
- In more severe cases, people usually need to go to the hospital where they can receive supportive treatment including intravenous fluids, help with breathing and nursing care.

What Should I Do if I Think I Have WNV?

- Contact your health care provider if you think you or a family member might be ill due to WNV infection.

What Is the Risk of Getting Sick from WNV?

- Anyone living in an area where WNV is present can be infected and experience serious illness. The more time you're outdoors, the more time you could be bitten by an infected mosquito. Pay attention to preventing mosquito bites if you spend time outside, either working or playing. Being outside means you're at risk. The more time you're outdoors, the more time you could be bitten by an infected mosquito. Pay attention to avoiding mosquito bites if you spend a lot of time outside, either working or playing.

For more information visit www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/west-nile-virus/index.html or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.cdc.gov/westnile/index.html.