



# West Nile Virus (WNV) Fact Sheet

## What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a potentially serious illness. Experts believe WNV is established as a seasonal epidemic in North America that flares up in the summer and continues into the fall.

## How does WNV spread?

- Infected mosquitoes – 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.
- Transfusions, transplants, and mother-to-child – In a very small number of cases, WNV also has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and even during pregnancy from mother to baby.
- Not through touching – WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.

## What are the symptoms?

- Milder symptoms– Symptoms can include 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 for as short as a few days up to several weeks.

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- Serious symptoms– About 1 in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include the mild symptoms as well as neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent.
- No symptoms– Approximately 80 percent of people (about 4 out of 5) who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all, but there is no way to know in advance if you will develop an illness or not.

## How soon do symptoms appear?

People typically develop symptoms between 3 and 14 days after they are bitten by the infected mosquito.

## How is WNV infection treated?

There is no specific treatment of WNV infection. 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 is the risk for getting sick from WNV?

People at any age can get WNV, however people over 50 are at higher risk to get severe illness. Spending time outdoors working or playing also puts you at risk. Risk through medical procedures is very low and all donated blood is

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checked for WNV before being used. The risk that WNV may present to a fetus or an infant infected through breast milk is still being evaluated. Talk with your healthcare provider if you have concerns.

### What can I do to prevent WNV?

The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites and follow the 3D's and P:

- **DRAIN** standing water on your property so mosquitoes won't breed. (Ex: flowerpots, buckets, tires, bird baths, and pools) Mosquito larvicide can be used if it is impractical to eliminate a breeding site.
- **DRESS** in long sleeves and pants when you're outside to discourage mosquitoes from biting.
- Spray a safe repellent with **DEET** as the active ingredient on exposed skin. Other active ingredients the CDC recommends includes picaridin, IR3535 and oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- **PREVENT** mosquito bites any time of day or night. Check and repair screens on doors and windows. Keep them closed and use air conditioning when you can.

*For further information, contact the  
Oklahoma City-County Health Department  
(405) 425-4437 or visit [www.occhd.org/fightthebite](http://www.occhd.org/fightthebite)*

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