

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

West Nile Virus

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

West Nile Virus (WNV) causes an infection that results in swelling of the brain (encephalitis). In a small number of people infected by the virus, the disease can be serious, even fatal.

How is West Nile Virus spread?

WNV is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. Horses bitten by mosquitoes that carry the virus can also become infected. A human or horse that has the disease cannot spread the virus. Whenever mosquitoes are active there is a risk of getting WNV, however, risk is highest from late July through September.

Is West Nile Virus in Oakland County?

In the summer of 2001, WNV was found in birds and mosquitoes in Oakland County and the State of Michigan. The first human cases of WNV were found in Oakland County in the summer of 2002. Federal, state and local officials continue to closely monitor the spread of this disease.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for WNV infection. Doctors can treat the symptoms of those infected with the virus. Those over 50 years of age and those with immune problems or other chronic illnesses are more likely to become seriously ill.

What are the symptoms?

Most people show no symptoms or have mild symptoms of the disease. Mild symptoms include fever, headache, muscle weakness, and body aches, often with skin rash and swollen lymph glands. More severe cases of the disease include headache, high fever, stiff neck, confusion, coma, tremors, paralysis and death.

What can you do to protect yourself?

The best way to protect yourself is to minimize your contact with mosquitoes by:

- Eliminating standing water that collects in birdbaths, boats, buckets, tires, unused pools, roof gutters and other containers.
- Use insect repellent. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the use of insect repellents containing active ingredients registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Two products that are registered with the EPA that have shown a high degree of effectiveness are DEET and Picaridin. Always follow manufacturer's directions carefully, especially when using on children.
- Wearing protective clothing such as long sleeved shirts and pants.
- Limiting outdoor activity primarily between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Avoiding areas where mosquitoes may be present (i.e. shaded and wooded areas).
- Maintaining window and door screening to keep mosquitoes out of buildings.



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Why report dead birds?

In 1999 a connection was made between an outbreak of human WNV infection and disease in birds, especially in American crows. All dead birds should be reported, by species when possible, to Oakland County Health Division's Environmental Health Services Unit at **(877) 377-3641**. Avoid barehanded contact with dead birds and other animals. Use gloves or double plastic bags. Keeping track of the locations of dead birds is important in determining the level of human risk in a particular area.

What is the Oakland County Health Division doing to protect people from WNV?

The Oakland County Health Division (OCHD) has a long-standing program to look for encephalitis viruses carried by mosquitoes. Every year, OCHD field staff collect mosquitoes for testing. OCHD will continue to inform the public of ways to prevent infection.

For more information on West Nile Virus or to report dead birds, contact:

Oakland County Health Division

Environmental Health Services – (877) 377-3641

www.oakgov.com/health

State Contact

Michigan Department of Agriculture

1-888-668-0869

www.mda.state.mi.us/consumer/westnilevirus/

National Contact

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Fax: 970-221-6476

E-mail: dvbid@cdc.gov

Web Site: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/dvbid.htm

CDC Information Service: 1-888-232-3228

For additional copies, visit our website at www.oakgov.com/health.

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The Oakland County Health Division will not deny participation in its programs based on race, sex, religion, national origin, age or disability. State and federal eligibility requirements apply for certain programs.