



Multnomah County Health Department

West Nile Virus

Questions & Answers

Multnomah County Vector and Nuisance Control is one of nine Oregon programs working together to detect the West Nile virus. In the event that West Nile virus is found among mosquito, horse, bird, or human populations in Oregon, the county is prepared to respond.

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

West Nile virus is a disease mostly affecting birds. It is spread among birds by mosquitoes. Mosquitoes get the virus from biting infected birds and then can pass it on to other birds, animals, or people. These mosquitoes can sometimes bite a person, but most people do not become very sick. In some people, West Nile Virus can cause encephalitis, or swelling of the brain.

How would I get WNV?

Humans can get WNV from the bite of a mosquito that is carrying the virus or through blood transfusions or organ donations from an infected donor. You cannot get WNV from donating your blood. There is also the possibility that the virus can be passed from pregnant mothers to unborn children. WNV may be passed through breast milk, but mothers are still encouraged to breastfeed their babies. In the majority of cases, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito.

Can I get WNV directly from birds?

There is no evidence that a person can get the virus by handling live or dead infected birds. However, it is important to wear gloves when handling any dead animal and wash hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after removing gloves.

Is WNV infection serious?

Most people who are infected do not get sick at all. Some people who are infected may develop a mild illness, with fever and body aches. Less than 1% of people who get bitten and become infected will get severely ill. The elderly are at greatest risk for serious illness.

What are symptoms of West Nile virus?

Most people who are infected have no symptoms. Some people may have fever, headache, nausea, body aches, or other symptoms. Very rarely the disease may progress to encephalitis which may cause severe headache, confusion, weakness, or dizziness. The time between a mosquito bite and onset of illness ranges from 3 to 14 days in humans.

What should I do if I think I may have symptoms of West Nile virus?

Call your health care provider if you have concerns about your health. See your provider immediately if you or your family members develop symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, and severe headaches. Tell your provider if you have been active outdoors or have recent mosquito bites.

Does West Nile virus affect dogs, cats, or horses?

There is a very low infection rate in dogs and cats. WNV causes illness and deaths in horses. WNV vaccine for horses is available. If you are concerned, contact your veterinarian.

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How can I reduce the number of mosquitoes around my home and neighborhood?

Decrease the places where mosquitoes breed. Mosquitoes reproduce by laying eggs on standing water. Mosquitoes can develop in any standing water that lasts more than four days. Even a small bucket with standing water can become home to up to 1,000 mosquitoes. Here are some tips to remove standing water:

Containers

- Throw away or empty tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or other containers.
- Remove old tires, and turn over wheelbarrows.

Ponds and pools

- Do not allow water gardens or ornamental ponds to stand still or stagnate.
- Use mosquito fish in ponds or water gardens.
- Turn over wading pools when not in use.
- Change the water in birdbaths at least once a week.
- Keep swimming pools cleaned and chlorinated. Empty water that collects on swimming pool covers.

Other standing water

- Fill in puddles. Report large areas of standing water at www.mchealthinspect.org.
- Clean rain gutters so water flows freely.

How can I protect myself and family?

Here are the best ways to decrease the chances of mosquito bites:

- Install or repair all window and door screens.
- Consider staying indoors during peak mosquito biting times, dusk to dawn.
- Wear long-sleeved clothing and long pants whenever you are outdoors.
- Avoid perfumes and colognes when outdoors for long periods of time.
- Use a mosquito repellent containing 20-30% DEET (a chemical used as insect repellent) for adults and no more than 10% for children when outdoors. Do not use mosquito repellent containing DEET on children under three years of age. **Read carefully and follow all directions on the insect repellent package.**
- Hunters should wear gloves when handling and cleaning animals to prevent blood exposure to bare hands. Game meat should be cooked thoroughly.
- **Limit outdoor activities when advised by local officials.**

What should I do if I find a dead bird?

Call Multnomah County Vector and Nuisance Control at 503-988-3464 or report online at www.mchealth.org/vector

Who should I call if I have a question or need more information?

Call Multnomah County West Nile Virus information line at 503-988-NILE (503-988-6453)

Visit Multnomah County Health Department's Environmental Health website:

www.mchealth.org or

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/q&a.htm