

## WEST NILE VIRUS

### 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. WNV is a viral infection that is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitos get infected with the WNV by feeding on infected birds. The infected mosquito then spread the virus by biting humans and other animals, such as horses. WNV was first identified in the United States in 1999.

### Who gets West Nile Virus?

Anyone can get infected with the West Nile Virus. The virus can affect anyone bitten by an infected mosquito. Less than 1% of people bitten by an infected mosquito will become seriously ill. People over the age of 50 are at greatest risk of developing severe disease.

This year's West Nile Virus outbreak is the biggest since the virus was first identified in the United States, health officials report. Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Oklahoma have been hit hard by the West Nile Virus this summer. The presence of the virus has been confirmed in all 21 New Jersey counties but with few illnesses reported.

### What are the symptoms of West Nile Virus?

Many people with West Nile Virus do not become ill or may not develop symptoms. When symptoms occur, they may be mild to severe and show up 3 – 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

- **Serious Symptoms in a Few People:** About 1 in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms 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 the neurological symptoms may be permanent.
- **Milder Symptoms in Some People:** Up to 20% of the people who become infected will display symptoms which can include fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a rash on the chest, stomach and back. Symptoms last for as short as a few days up to several weeks.
- **No Symptoms in Most People:** Approximately 80% of people who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all.

*How is West Nile diagnosed?*

If a health care provider suspects WNV, samples of the patient's blood or spinal fluid will be examined.

*How is West Nile Virus spread?*

- **Infected Mosquitos**
- **Transfusions, Transplants, and Mother-to-Baby**
- **NOT THROUGH TOUCHING OR CASUAL CONTACT.**

*How is West Nile Virus treated?*

There is no specific treatment for WNV infection.

*How can West Nile Virus be prevented?*

- Wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long sleeved shirt when outdoors at dusk or dawn which is when mosquitos are most active.
- Use an EPA-registered insect repellent. Follow the directions for use on the product.
- Make sure all windows have screens that are in good condition.
- Drain any standing water.
- Report concerns about mosquitos to the appropriate authority.