



Questions & Answers about West Nile Virus

Public Health – Seattle & King County
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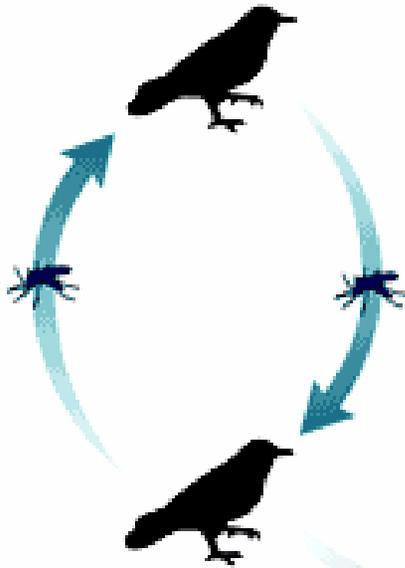
What is West Nile Virus?

- West Nile Virus is an infection that is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito
- The virus was discovered in Uganda in 1937
- The virus was first detected in humans in the United States in 1999



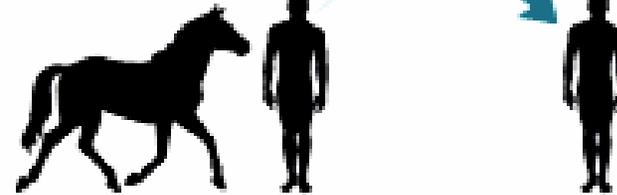
How is West Nile Virus spread?

1. A mosquito becomes infected by biting an infected bird



2. The mosquito bites and infects other birds, continuing the cycle

4. People can also become infected by blood transfusions and organ transplants – this rarely happens because donors are tested for West Nile Virus



3. Infected mosquitoes can bite and infect people and other animals - dogs and cats do not appear to get sick from WNV



How do people get infected?

- Humans and some animals get West Nile Virus from the bite of an infected mosquito
- The virus is not spread by human to human contact
- The virus can be spread by blood transfusion or organ transplantation, but this rarely happens because donors are tested for infection



How serious is the disease?

- About 80% of people with WNV do not have any symptoms, or have mild symptoms
- About 20% of infected people will develop West Nile Fever
- Approximately 1 in 150 infected people will develop the most severe form of the disease involving the brain and nervous system, some with death or long term disability



What are the symptoms of West Nile Fever?

- Similar to the flu, but without respiratory symptoms
 - Sudden fever
 - Body aches
 - Eye pain or sensitivity to light
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Feeling tired
 - Stomach pain
 - Rash (this is a rare symptom)



What are the symptoms of more severe infection?

- People may have these symptoms:
 - Trouble walking
 - Muscle twitching
 - Trouble moving arms and / or legs
 - Tremors or shaking
 - Confusion
- Severe infections can cause death and disability



Do people recover from severe West Nile Virus infection?

- Some people recover completely
- Some people recover partially, over time
- Some people have lasting disabilities like paralysis or difficulty moving around



Who is most at risk of serious illness?

- People older than age 50
- People who have diabetes or other chronic illnesses
- People with weakened immune systems



What treatment is available?

- Hospital care for those with severe illness
- No medications are effective at treating West Nile virus
- No vaccine is available (except for horses)



How can we protect ourselves from West Nile Virus?

- Avoid mosquito bites
- Reduce mosquito breeding grounds



How do I avoid mosquito bites?

- Try to schedule outdoor activities for times other than dawn or dusk - otherwise, be sure to use an effective repellent
- Wear mosquito repellent containing one of the following ingredients:
 - DEET (not for use on infants less than 2 months old)
 - Picaridin
 - Lemon Eucalyptus oil (not for children under 3 years)
- Treat clothing, shoes, and camping gear with DEET or permethrin
- Check screen windows and doors around home



How do I use repellents safely?

- Follow manufacturer's instructions
- Do not spray in a confined space
- Adults should apply repellent to children, avoiding child's hands
- Reapply after excessive sweating or swimming
- Do not apply to cuts, wounds or irritated skin



How do I reduce mosquito breeding grounds?

- Get rid of standing water!



To reduce standing water where mosquitoes can breed:

- Change water in bird baths and animal feeding troughs at least once every week
- Empty children's wading pools when not in use
- Tip over wheelbarrows and containers that may collect water



More ways to reduce mosquito breeding grounds...

- Clean out garden ponds
- Dispose of used tires
- Drain water off of tarps or plastic sheeting
- If roof is flat, clear gutters to avoid pooling water



How can I help my community with West Nile Virus?

- Report dead crows and other dead birds – some are tested for infection
 - Call Public Health at 206-205-4394
 - Use the online reporting website:
www.metrokc.gov/health/westnile/deadbird.htm
- Assist the elderly with West Nile Virus prevention
- Help reduce standing water in your community