

West Nile Virus and People Over 50



What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a disease spread by mosquitoes. It can infect humans, birds, horses, and other animals. Most of the time, WNV causes mild flu-like illness or no symptoms at all. Among people over 50, however, WNV can sometimes cause serious illnesses like meningitis or encephalitis (brain swelling).

Why is West Nile Virus more dangerous for older people?

Older people are more likely to develop serious problems from WNV because their immune systems are not as strong as when they were younger. Also, an older person with other health problems may not be able to fight the infection as well. As a result, people who are older than 50, and or who have conditions that weaken their immune systems, have a greater risk of death from WNV.

What are the symptoms of West Nile Virus?

Symptoms can include fever, headache, and body aches, nausea, vomiting, and a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. More serious symptoms include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness, paralysis or coma.

Who is at risk for West Nile Virus?

Anyone can get WNV. If you are outside, you are at risk. The more time you spend outdoors, the greater your risk of being bitten by an infected mosquito. If you spend a lot of time outside, either working or playing, make sure you protect yourself from mosquito bites.

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How can I protect myself from West Nile Virus?

The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites.

Put up screens. Make sure you have good screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out. Be sure to patch holes where mosquitoes can get inside.

Use bug spray. When you are outdoors, use insect repellent containing no more than 30% DEET. Be sure to follow the directions. Do not use on babies under two months old. Be careful! Don't get it in your mouth or eyes. Wash your hands after you apply it.

Cover up. Wear long-sleeve shirts and long pants when you go outside. You can even spray your clothes with a bug repellent for more protection. Use mosquito netting over infant carriers when you are outdoors with babies.

Take care when the sun goes down. Mosquitoes bite the most between dusk and dawn. Always use bug spray and wear protective clothing in the evening and early morning. If you can't protect yourself, try to stay inside at these times.

Drain standing water. Mosquitoes can breed in any place that holds water. Get rid of things like old tires and empty flower pots. Empty the water out of swimming pool covers, birdbaths, clogged gutters and trash cans—any place that holds standing water. Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird baths weekly. Empty children's wading pools and put them on their sides when they are not being used. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out.



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