

# WEST NILE VIRUS

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

## ***WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV)?***

West Nile virus is a **mosquito-carried virus** that can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord). However, in most people, WNV infection causes no illness or mild illness.

## ***IS WEST NILE VIRUS IN MASSACHUSETTS?***

**Yes.** WNV has been found in Massachusetts in birds, mosquitoes, horses and humans.

## ***HOW IS WNV SPREAD?***

West Nile virus is spread to people by the **bite of an infected mosquito**. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird which carries the virus. You cannot get WNV from a person who has the disease.

## ***SHOULD I REPORT DEAD BIRDS?***

**Yes.** It is important to report the location of dead birds to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health by calling 1-866-MASS WNV (627-7968). While most dead birds will not be collected and tested for WNV, keeping track of their locations plays an important role in directing further bird, mosquito and human surveillance activities.

## ***WILL THERE BE PESTICIDE SPRAYING IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD?***

Depending on whether or not WNV is found in birds and mosquitoes in your area, pesticide spraying may be done. Your local board of health or mosquito control project is the best source for this information.

## ***I'VE BEEN BITTEN BY A MOSQUITO. SHOULD I BE TESTED FOR WNV?***

**No. Illnesses caused by mosquito bites are very rare.** Very few mosquito bites carry any risk. People who may be infected by mosquitoes carrying the West Nile virus will usually experience **no illness or very mild illness**. However, you should see a doctor immediately if you develop symptoms such as:

- high fever
- severe headache
- confusion
- stiff neck
- muscle weakness
- sensitivity to light

Patients with mild symptoms usually recover completely, and do not require any specific medication or laboratory testing. Fewer than 1% of people infected with WNV develop serious illness. Persons older than 50 years of age have a higher risk of developing severe illness such as encephalitis.

## ***IS THERE TREATMENT OR A VACCINE FOR WNV?***

There is **no vaccine or specific treatment** for WNV infection, but doctors can treat the symptoms of WNV. In severe cases, hospitalization may be needed to provide supportive care.

### **Questions?**

**Call 1-866-MASS WNV or visit our web site: [www.state.ma.us/dph](http://www.state.ma.us/dph)**

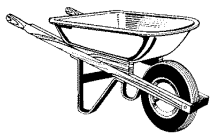
## **Protect Yourself**

Your risk of getting ill from West Nile virus is low, but you can lower your risk even more. Since there is no vaccine for WNV, **the best way to protect yourself is to keep mosquitoes from biting you.** Follow these simple steps and protect yourself:

- Limit **outdoor activities** between dusk and dawn.
- If you must be outdoors, **wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants and socks.**
- Consider using a **mosquito repellent** that contains DEET (the chemical N-N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) and follow the directions on the label. Never use DEET on infants. Avoid using repellents with DEET concentrations above 10-15% for children and above 30-35% for adults. Cream, lotion or stick formulas are best for use on skin.
- Make sure **window and door screens** do not have holes in them.

## **Remove Standing Water**

Mosquitoes grow in standing (stagnant) water. Getting rid of that water helps to lower the number of mosquitoes in your area. Look outside your house for containers and other things that might collect water and turn them over, regularly empty them, or dispose of them.



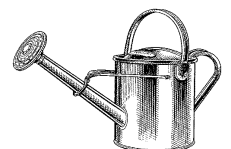
wheelbarrows



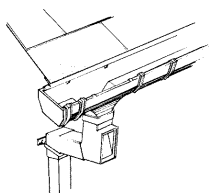
unused flower pots



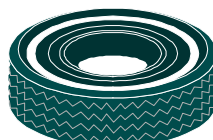
trash cans and lids



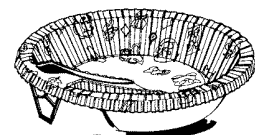
watering cans



storm gutters



tires



wading pools