



# Tarrant County Public Health

*A healthier community through leadership in health strategy*

## The Facts About West Nile Virus

### What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a potentially serious virus most commonly spread by infected mosquitoes. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. WNV can cause fever, inflammation of the brain, the lining of the brain and the spinal cord. WNV can be transmitted year-round in Texas.

### What are the symptoms of WNV?

**No symptoms in most people.** Up to 80 percent of people infected with WNV do not develop symptoms.

**Febrile illness in some people.** About 20 percent of infected people will develop a fever with other symptoms such as headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea or rash. Most people with this type of WNV disease recover completely, but fatigue and weakness can last for weeks or months.

**Severe symptoms in a few people.** Less than one percent of infected people develop inflammation of the brain or surrounding tissues. The symptoms of neurologic illness can include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, seizures or paralysis.

### How does WNV spread?

WNV often spreads by the bite of an infected mosquito. In a very small number of cases, WNV also has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and pregnancy. WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person infected with the virus.

### Is there a vaccine available to protect people from WNV?

No. Currently there is no WNV vaccine available for people.

### How soon do people get sick after getting bitten by an infected mosquito?

The incubation period is usually 2 to 6 days, but ranges from 2 to 14 days.

### Who is at risk for serious illness if infected with WNV?

Cancer, diabetes, hypertension and kidney disease patients are at a greater risk.

### What is the treatment for WNV disease?

Pain relievers can reduce fever and relieve some symptoms. People with milder symptoms typically recover on their own. In more severe cases, patients often hospitalized to receive supportive treatment, such as intravenous fluids, pain medication and nursing care.

### How can people reduce the chance of getting infected?

The most effective way to avoid West Nile virus disease is to prevent mosquito bites:

- Use DEET-based insect repellents when outdoors.
- Wear long sleeves and pants at dusk, dawn and during the day when mosquitoes are most active.
- Install or repair screens on windows and doors. If you have it, use your air conditioning.
- Reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home. Dump standing water.

For more information, call 817-321-4700  
or visit <http://health.tarrantcounty.com>

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