

Health Bulletin:

Protect Against West Nile Virus



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#8 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

Mosquito-Proof New York City

- West Nile virus (WNV) is spread to people by infected mosquitoes.
- WNV can cause serious or even fatal illness, especially in people older than 50.
- To protect yourself against WNV:
 - Limit exposure to mosquitoes, and
 - Control mosquitoes near your home.

How to Avoid West Nile Virus

During the mosquito season (April through October):

Protect yourself.

If outside in the evening between dusk and dawn (when mosquitoes are most active):

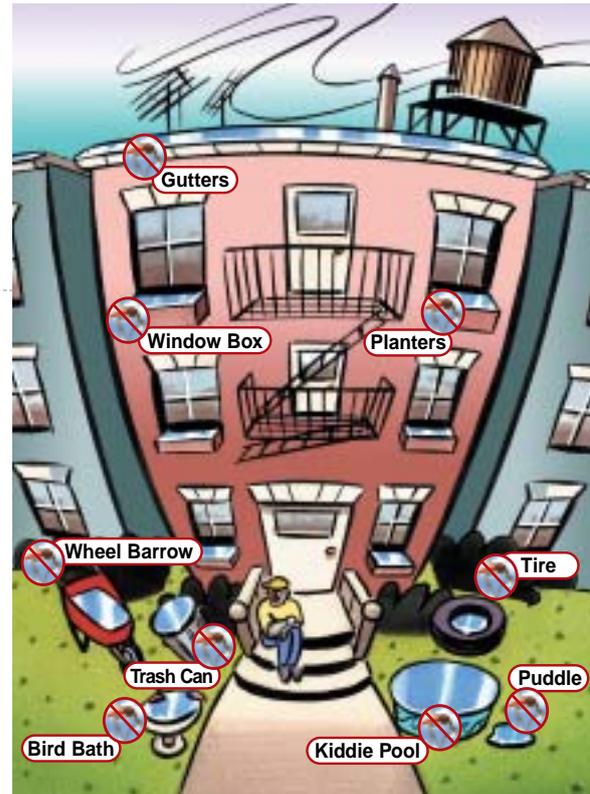
- **Cover up.** Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks.
- **Use an insect repellent with DEET.** Insect repellents containing DEET are the only products that are both effective and safe when used according to manufacturer's directions.

Protect your home.

- **Get rid of standing water, where mosquitoes can breed.**
 - Empty garbage containers and lids, buckets, cans, flower pots, pool covers, and other items where water collects.
 - Remove discarded tires.
 - Clean and chlorinate swimming pools. Empty and cover them if they're not in use.
 - Turn over wading pools when not in use.
 - Clean pet water bowls and bird baths frequently.
 - Make sure gutters are clear of debris so they can drain properly.
 - Cover wells or other outdoor water storage.
- **Use screens.** Put screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out. Fix or replace broken screens.

Protect your community.

- **Report dead birds and standing water.** Dead birds may indicate WNV infection, and mosquitoes breed in standing water. Report both online at nyc.gov/health/wnv or by calling 311.
- **Help your neighbors.** Remind or help neighbors to eliminate standing water from their property.



What Is West Nile Virus?

- West Nile is a mosquito-borne virus first seen in the Western Hemisphere in New York City in 1999.
- West Nile virus has since spread widely throughout North America. In the U.S. in 2002, there were more than 4,000 cases of WNV and nearly 300 deaths.

How Is It Spread?

- West Nile virus is mostly spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito gets infected by biting a bird that carries the virus.
- People *cannot* get WNV directly from another person, such as by touching or having other close physical contact.
- These routes of WNV transmission to people, though very uncommon, are possible:
 - People can get WNV from infected organs through transplantation, or from transfusions of infected blood or blood products.
 - A pregnant woman can transmit WNV to her fetus.
 - A mother can transmit WNV to her baby through breast milk.



Who Is at Risk?

- Anyone can be infected with West Nile virus, though most people will have no symptoms or only a mild illness.
- People infected with WNV who are over 50, especially those 65 and older, have the highest risk of severe disease.

What Are the Symptoms of WNV Infection?

- Most people infected with West Nile virus either have no symptoms, or experience only a mild illness – such as fever, headache, body aches, a mild rash, or swollen lymph glands – before fully recovering.
- In some people, especially those over 50, WNV can cause serious disease, such as:
 - Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).
 - Meningitis (inflammation of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord).
 - Acute flaccid paralysis (a polio-like illness in which muscles become very weak or paralyzed).
- Symptoms of severe illness may include: headache, high fever, stiff neck, confusion, coma, tremors, convulsions, and muscle weakness or paralysis.
 - WNV can cause permanent brain damage and death.
 - Anyone with severe symptoms should see a doctor immediately.
- There is currently no specific treatment and no vaccine for West Nile virus.
- Most people infected with WNV will get better on their own.
 - In severe cases, medical treatment or hospitalization may be needed.
 - If illness does occur, symptoms usually appear between 3 to 15 days of being bitten by an infected mosquito.

What New York City Is Doing About West Nile Virus

- To help control mosquitoes, New York City:
 - Drains standing water to eliminate breeding sites.
 - Applies larvicide (to kill mosquito larvae) to standing water that cannot be drained.
 - Conducts surveillance and tests mosquitoes, birds, and people for WNV.
 - If needed, in areas where there is a high risk of human infection, New York City applies pesticide on the ground or by air to kill adult mosquitoes.
- New York City always announces larvicide applications and pesticide spraying at least 24 hours in advance. Listen for media announcements, or visit nyc.gov/health/wnv or call 311 for spraying schedules.

Risks of pesticides to people and pets are low. Some people with asthma or other respiratory conditions may be more sensitive to pesticides and should:

- Stay inside during spraying.
- Close air conditioner vents, or choose the “recirculate” setting during spraying.
- Wash outdoor equipment and toys with soap and water after spraying.
- Wash skin and clothing with soap and water if exposed to pesticides.

Anyone experiencing adverse reactions to pesticides should seek medical care or call the NYC Poison Control Center at 212-POISONS (212-764-7667) or 311.

More Information

- Visit nyc.gov/health/wnv or call 311
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/westnile or call 1-800-311-3435

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**Health & Mental Hygiene
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