

Frequently Asked Questions About  
**West Nile Virus**



Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services  
7001-A East Parkway, Suite 600A  
Sacramento, CA 95823  
(916) 875-5881

## Frequently Asked Questions About **WEST NILE VIRUS**



### **Q. What is West Nile virus?**

- A. West Nile virus is a flavivirus commonly found in Africa, West Asia and the Middle East. It is closely related to St. Louis encephalitis virus found in the United States.

### **Q. How do people get infected with West Nile virus?**

- A. People become infected by the bite of a mosquito infected with West Nile virus.

### **Q. If I live in an area where birds or mosquitoes with West Nile virus have been reported and a mosquito bites me, am I likely to get sick?**

- A. No. Even in areas where the virus is circulating, very few mosquitoes are infected with the virus. Even if the mosquito is infected, less than 1% of people who get bitten and become infected will get severely ill. The chances you will become severely ill from any one mosquito bite are extremely small.

### **Q. Who is at risk for getting West Nile encephalitis?**

- A. All residents of areas where virus activity has been identified are at risk of developing West Nile encephalitis; however, the likelihood of severe disease occurrence increases with increasing age. Persons over 60 years of age are considered at highest risk. It is likely that persons with immune compromising conditions are also at higher risk.

### **Q. What can I do to reduce my risk of becoming infected with West Nile virus?**

- A. Protect yourself from mosquito bites:
- Stay indoors when mosquito activity is high, usually during dawn and dusk.
  - Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants if you must be outdoors during this time.
  - Use mosquito repellent containing DEET. Apply repellent sparingly, and always follow label directions. Children under 5 years of age should not use DEET.
  - Drain all standing water on private property and stock permanent ponds with fish that eat mosquito larvae.

### **Q. What are the symptoms of West Nile virus infection?**

- A. The symptoms of severe infection (West Nile encephalitis, meningitis and meningoencephalitis) include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness and paralysis. It is estimated that 1 in 150 persons infected with West Nile virus will develop a more severe form of the disease.

### **Q. I think I have symptoms of West Nile virus infection. What should I do?**

- A. Contact your health care provider if you have concerns about your health. If you or your family members develop symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, and severe headaches, you should see your doctor immediately.

### **Q. Can you get West Nile virus from another person?**

- A. No. West Nile encephalitis is NOT transmitted from person-to-person. For example, you cannot get West Nile virus from touching or kissing a person who has the disease, or from a health care worker who has treated someone with the disease.

### **Q. Should people avoid donating blood or getting blood transfusions or organ transplants?**

- A. Blood is lifesaving and is in short supply. Donating blood is safe and the CDC encourages blood donation now and in the future. The medical need of getting blood or organs far outweighs any potential risk of getting West Nile virus transmission from blood or organs.

*All information is from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice. For more information, please call your local health department at (916) 875-5881.*