

# West Nile Virus (WNV)

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## What is it?

- WNV is a virus that mainly affects birds but can affect humans, horses, cats, bats, chipmunks, skunks, squirrels and domestic rabbits.
- Most people who are infected with WNV will not have any symptoms.
- A small number of people infected with WNV will have mild symptoms such as:
  - fever
  - rash on back and stomach
  - headaches
  - vomiting
  - body aches
  - swollen lymph glands
  - nausea
- Rarely, people infected with WNV will develop severe symptoms such as:
  - high fever
  - coma
  - tremors
  - paralysis
  - headache
  - disorientation
  - convulsions
  - numbness
  - neck stiffness
  - stupor
  - muscle weakness
  - vision loss

## How is it spread?

- **Infected mosquitoes.** Most often, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can then spread WNV to humans and other animals when they bite.
- **Transfusions, transplants and mother-to-child.** In a very small number of cases, WNV also has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and during pregnancy from mother to baby.
- **Not through touching.** WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.

## Is there treatment for it?

- There is no specific treatment for WNV infection.
- Milder symptoms usually pass on their own within days to several weeks.
- Severe symptoms may need supportive treatment including intravenous fluids, help breathing and nursing care. Serious symptoms may last weeks and some symptoms may not go away.
- If you develop severe symptoms, you should seek medical help right away.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of it?

- Use insect repellent containing DEET when you are outdoors. Follow the directions on the package.
- Use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants at dusk and at dawn. Many mosquitos are most active during these times. Consider staying indoors during these times.
- Keep good screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out.
- Get rid of mosquito breeding areas by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets and barrels. Change the water in pet dishes daily and replace the water in bird baths weekly. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out. Keep children's wading pools empty and on their sides when not in use.

## For more information

Ministry of Health and Long Term Care

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ccom/wnv/>

**Stop the spread of germs and infection.  
Clean your hands.**

