



## West Nile Virus

### What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a disease spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito. The virus originated in Africa, West Asia and Europe and entered this country through migratory birds. The virus was first identified in the United States in 1999, following an outbreak of disease in New York.

### How is it spread?

West Nile virus is spread from bird to bird by mosquito bites. People and other animals are infected by the bite of a mosquito that gets the virus from feeding on an infected bird or other infected animal. There is no evidence to suggest that West Nile virus can be spread from person to person.

### What are the symptoms?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), symptoms are divided into three categories:

- **Serious symptoms in a few people.** About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks and neurological effects may be permanent.
- **Milder symptoms in some people.** Up to 20 percent of the people who become infected have symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. Symptoms can last for as short as a few days, though even healthy people have become sick for several weeks.
- **No symptoms in most people.** Approximately 80 percent of people (about four out of five) who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all.

It may take three to 14 days for symptoms to appear. Anyone with West Nile virus symptoms should see a health care provider. Symptoms can be treated, but there is no treatment for West Nile virus itself.

### How serious of a health threat is West Nile virus?

The virus has been identified in birds and other animals in most states. West Nile virus has caused illness and death in some humans. However, human illness from West Nile virus is rare, even in areas where the virus has been reported.

### How can we avoid West Nile virus and other mosquito viruses?

The best way to prevent infection is to prevent mosquito breeding in places around your home. Mosquitoes breed in stagnant water. Clean leaf-clogged gutters and throw away used tires, cans, unused flowerpots or anything else that holds water. Fill tree holes, change birdbath water weekly and screen or cover rain barrels to eliminate breeding areas. Remove dog and cat bowls after you have fed you pet.

Check basements for standing water. Avoid being outdoors during peak mosquito activity (dawn and dusk). If you have to be out during these times, wear long pants and a shirt with long sleeves. You can use repellants to prevent mosquito bites. Carefully follow the label directions. If you have a pond or retention pond, please check for the presence of fish. If the pond needs to be stocked, we recommend buying fish that eat mosquitoes, such as goldfish. You can also contact Guilford County Department of Public Health's (GCDPH) Environmental Health Program for Gambusia (larvae eating fish).

For more information, call GCDPH or visit our website at [www.myguilford.com](http://www.myguilford.com) or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), search West Nile Virus.