



## WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV)

### **What is West Nile Virus?**

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne infection that can cause serious illness and death. It is the leading cause of mosquito-borne disease in the United States.

Delaware's first human case of WNV was confirmed in 2002. Since that time, there have been over 50 cases and five deaths reported.

### **Who gets WNV?**

Anyone who lives in an area where WNV has been identified can get it. Individuals over 50 years old have a higher risk for severe disease. All three counties in Delaware have found mosquitoes or sentinel animals that tested positive for WNV.

### **How is WNV?**

WNV is spread primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds, and then spread the virus to people and other animals by biting them. In rare cases, WNV has been spread through exposure in a laboratory setting, blood transfusions and organ transplants, and mother to baby during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.

### **What are the symptoms of WNV?**

Most people infected with WNV (eight out of 10) will not develop any symptoms. About one in five people will develop a fever of 100.4 degrees F or higher with other symptoms like headache, body aches, joint pains, diarrhea, and a rash. About one in 150 people who are infected develop severe illness that affects the central nervous systems, such as encephalitis or meningitis. Symptoms of severe illness are high fever, headache, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness, and paralysis.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

After exposure to an infected mosquito, symptoms can occur typically from two to six days later. Symptoms appear in the range of two to 14 days.

### **Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?**

Exclusion from work and school is not necessary because there is no evidence of person-to-person transmission.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What is the treatment for WNV?**

There are no specific medications available for WNV infection. Over-the-counter pain relievers can be used to reduce fever and relieve some symptoms. Severe illness often requires hospitalization and supportive care.

## **What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of WNV?**

There is no vaccine to prevent WNV. The best way to prevent WNV is to prevent mosquito bites. Follow these tips to reduce mosquitoes:

Outside the home:

- Remove standing water where mosquitoes lay eggs.
  - Once a week, empty and scrub, turn over, cover, or throw out items that hold water: tires, buckets, planters, toys, pools, birdbaths, flowerpot saucers, and trash containers.
  - Tightly cover water storage containers (buckets, cisterns, rain barrels) so mosquitoes cannot get inside to lay eggs.
  - For containers without lids, use wire mesh with holes smaller than an adult mosquito.
  - Fill tree holes to prevent them from filling with water.
  - If you have a septic tank, repair cracks or gaps. Cover open vent or plumbing pipes using wire mesh with holes smaller than an adult mosquito.

Inside the home:

- Install or repair and use window and door screens.
- Close doors, including garage doors. Do not leave doors propped open.
- Use air conditioning when possible.

## **Resources**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/westnile/>

Delaware Public Media,  
<https://www.delawarepublic.org/science-health-tech/2021-09-03/delaware-sees-first-human-case-of-west-nile-virus-since-2018>

**Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology**  
**24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156**

Revised: 01/2023  
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