

ALLEGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Office Administration

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Bioterrorism Preparedness

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Personal Health

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Communicable Disease

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Environmental Health

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Resource Recovery

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West Nile Virus

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

WNV is a viral infection that occurs most often in bird but is spread to humans by mosquitoes. Most infections happen from June to September.

How is it spread?

Most often, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. In a very small number of cases, WNV also has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding, and even during pregnancy from mother to baby. WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.

What are the symptoms?

Most people infected with the virus will not develop symptoms. About 20% of people who have become infected will have fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes), body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph nodes. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting for several days to a week. Symptoms typically begin 2 to 7 days after being bitten by a mosquito. Less than 1% of infected people will develop severe illness, such as meningitis or encephalitis.

What is the treatment for WNV?

There is no specific treatment. In cases with milder symptoms, people experience symptoms such as fever and aches that pass on their own. In more severe cases, people usually need to go to the hospital where they can receive supportive treatment.

What can people do to prevent WNV infection?

The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites.

- Stay in places with air conditioning or that use window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside;
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellants; follow the directions on the package and make sure to spray your clothing as mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing;
- Many mosquitoes are active at dusk and dawn. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants;
- If you use both sunscreen and insect repellent, apply the sunscreen first and then the repellent;
- Help reduce the number of mosquitoes inside and outside your home or hotel room by emptying, turning over, covering, or throwing out items that hold water.

More information can be found at www.cdc.gov/wnv or www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases/

To learn about health department services and/or other health topics, visit us on the web:
www.allegancounty.org or contact us at 269-673-5411