West Nile Virus

What is West Nile Virus?

- West Nile virus can be a serious, even fatal, illness. It can affect people, horses, certain types of birds and other animals. West Nile virus first appeared in the United States in 1999. In 2002, the virus was found for the first time in birds and horses in Washington .

How is it spread?

- West Nile virus is almost always spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected after feeding on birds that carry the virus. There is no evidence that West Nile virus can be spread by direct contact with infected people or animals.

Who is at risk?

- The risk of getting West Nile virus is very low, but anyone can become infected. People over 50 years of age have the highest risk of serious illness.

What are the symptoms?

- Most people who are infected with West Nile virus will not get sick. About 1 in 5 people infected will have mild symptoms such as fever, headache and body aches. Even fewer, about 1 in 150 people infected, will have more severe symptoms. Severe symptoms may include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis and coma. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your health care provider.

How can I protect myself?

- There is no human vaccine for West Nile virus. The best way to protect yourself and your family is to avoid mosquito bites and

reduce the places mosquitoes live and breed around your home. Take these steps:

Avoid mosquito bites

- Make sure windows and doors are “bug tight.” Repair or replace screens.
- Stay indoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are the most active.
- Wear a long sleeve shirt, long pants and a hat when going into mosquito-infested areas, such as wetlands or woods.
- Use mosquito repellant when necessary. Read the label and carefully follow instructions. Take special care when using repellent on children. Mosquito repellents that contain the active ingredients DEET, Picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus are the most effective for offering long-lasting protection against mosquito bites.

Don’t give mosquitoes a home

- Empty or throw away anything that holds standing water—bottles, cans, old tires, buckets, plastic covers and toys.
- Change water in your birdbaths, fountains, wading pools and animal troughs at least twice each week.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly; and clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Fix leaky outdoor faucets and sprinklers.

For more information on preventing West Nile Virus, including what employers and workers can do to reduce their risk, go to www.doh.wa.gov/wnv

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