
How Does the Virus Spread?

West Nile virus is carried by infected birds. It is spread locally by mosquitoes that bite these infected birds. The mosquitoes then pass the virus on to birds and horses, and sometimes humans and other animals.

While a West Nile virus vaccine has been developed for horses, a human vaccine is not likely to be available for several years. Animals such as cats and dogs can be infected but cannot spread the virus and rarely become sick.

What Are the Symptoms?

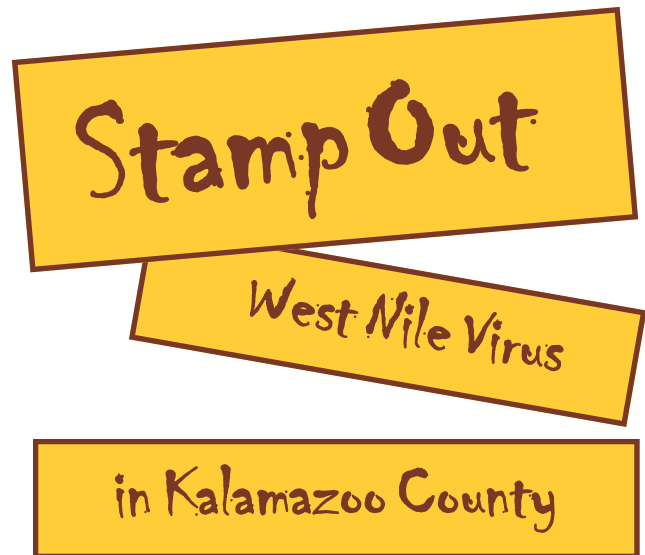
Most people who become infected with the virus will not become ill. Those who do become ill will generally experience mild flu-like symptoms three to 14 days after exposure. These symptoms include fever, headache and body aches, and occasionally skin rashes or swollen lymph nodes.

In a more severe infection (West Nile encephalitis) symptoms include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, tremors, disorientation, coma, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis. A severe infection can result in permanent brain damage or, in rare cases, death. People with these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately.



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Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department programs are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, or disability.



Fight the Bite!

West Nile virus is a disease that can be transmitted to humans by mosquitoes. While the virus has long been common in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, it only recently made its way to the U.S. Since its first appearance in New York in 1999, it has quickly traveled westward and can now be found in almost every state.

While West Nile virus has received a great amount of attention during the last few years, it is important to note that catching the virus is rare. Of those who do catch the virus, most do not get sick or experience only mild flu-like symptoms. However, it is estimated that one in 150 persons infected with West Nile virus may develop a more severe form of the disease, which can be fatal.

By learning the facts and adopting some simple preventative measures you can protect yourself and your family from this disease.

How Do I Protect Myself?

West Nile virus can only be transmitted to humans by mosquitoes, so it's important to avoid mosquito bites and take steps to reduce the mosquito population.

Avoiding Mosquito Bites

- Limit time spent outdoors at dawn or dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and light colored long pants when outdoors.
- Spray clothing with insect repellent containing DEET. Apply sparingly to exposed skin.
- Install or repair window and door screens to keep mosquitoes out.

Reducing the Mosquito Population

Mosquitoes lay eggs in still water. Eggs hatch within seven to 10 days. If standing water is eliminated weekly, mosquitoes won't have a place to breed. Here are some things you can do:

- Empty water from flower pots, pet food dishes, birdbaths, toys, swimming pool covers, buckets, barrels, and cans.
- Clean roof gutters and downspouts often.
- Do not over water lawns and gardens. Keep grass cut short.
- Recycle old tires and drill drainage holes in tire swings.
- Turn over or remove outdoor containers where rainwater collects.
- Stock ornamental ponds, fountains, and livestock water tanks with fish that eat mosquitoes.

What Do I Do if I Find a Dead Bird?

To submit an online report of a dead bird to the State of Michigan, visit the State of Michigan website: www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases and click on the West Nile Virus link.

Where Can I Get More Information?

Visit the Kalamazoo County website at www.kalcounty.com or call the Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department at 269-373-5200.

