

West Nile Virus Information Sheet

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

West Nile Virus is a type of virus that mostly infects birds but can also infect horses and humans. WNV did not appear in Arizona until 2003, but since that time the virus has been active in Arizona. In addition to humans, horses, and birds, WNV can affect some other animals.

How can you catch WNV?

WNV is spread by mosquitoes that feed on infected birds. The mosquitoes then bite people or horses, which may or may not show symptoms. Most people who get infected with WNV will not have any symptoms; 1 in 5 infected people will have mild flu-like symptoms. About 1 of every 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness, including paralysis. People over age 50 are most at risk for severe illness.

What are the symptoms of WNV?

Usually, symptoms start 2 to 14 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. Symptoms can include:

Milder symptoms (more common)

- Fever
- Headache
- Body aches
- Rash (more common in children)
- Joint pain

Severe symptoms (less common)

- Severe headache
- High fever
- Stiff neck
- Muscle weakness
- Confusion
- Tremors, paralysis or coma

How can you be treated for WNV?

There is no specific medicine to treat WNV. Severe illness may require hospitalization.

How can you prevent WNV?

- When possible, stay inside between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear clothing that covers your arms and legs.
- Use insect repellent on exposed skin and clothes. Always follow label instructions.
- Fix broken screens in windows and doors.
- Eliminate places where mosquitoes can lay eggs. Empty standing water from places like buckets, flower pots, and old tires. Empty and refresh water in pet dishes every 2 days.