

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON HEALTH CENTER

-HEALTHBERRY-

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WEST NILE VIRUS

West Nile Virus is an arbovirus (short for arthropod-borne virus) that causes meningoencephalitis (inflammation of the spinal cord and brain). These viruses are transmitted by blood feeding insects such as mosquitoes. Most infections have been identified in wild birds, but the virus can also infect horses, dogs, cats, bats, chipmunks, skunks, squirrels, rabbits, domestic birds and humans. Mosquitoes draw the virus from infected birds and transit it to animals and humans through bites. West Nile virus is not transmitted directly from person to person, animal to person or animal-to-animal.

The risk of becoming ill from a single mosquito bite is extremely low. In areas where mosquitoes carry the virus, less than 1% are actually infected. Among those infected, only 1% become severely ill.

Most infections in humans are relatively mild, with flu-like symptoms including fever, headache, body aches, and in some cases, skin rash and generalized swollen lymph glands. Signs of severe infection include high fever, neck stiffness, muscle weakness, convulsions and paralysis. Death rates from severe infections range from 3 to 15% and are highest among the elderly.

There is no specific antibiotic or vaccine for the treatment of West Nile virus in humans. Treatment consists of intravenous fluids, respiratory support and prevention of secondary infections.

Limiting exposure to mosquitoes is effective prevention: Check the screens around your home, porch or patio to be sure they are intact. Avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when the mosquitoes are more active. If you must be outside during these times, cover up with shoes, socks, long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Use mosquito repellants on exposed skin and spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or 35% DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) since mosquitoes can bite through thin clothing. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions for use. Eliminate stagnant water from any receptacles in which mosquitoes might breed.

If you have any questions about West Nile fever, please do not hesitate to contact us at the University Health Clinic. Your health care provider at the Health Center is ready to help you.



Healthfully yours,

Dr. Healthberry

For questions or comments you can;

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