

# **MANAGING YOUR WEST NILE VIRUS INFECTION**

## **What Is West Nile Virus Infection?**

West Nile virus infection is an infection passed by infected mosquitoes. Most infections don't cause symptoms. Rarely, West Nile virus can cause serious illnesses of the brain (encephalitis) and the membranes covering the brain (meningitis). Adults older than 50 have a higher risk of serious infection.

## **What Causes West Nile Virus Infection?**

Mosquitoes carrying the virus pass the virus to humans by bites. The virus is in the flavivirus family. It's found in many places in nature, and it infects many birds and certain mammals. The infection isn't contagious from person to person.

## **What Are the Symptoms of West Nile Virus Infection?**

Most people have no symptoms. Others have the most common symptoms, which are like those of the flu. They include cough, diarrhea, fever, loss of appetite, and painful joints and muscles. Other signs and symptoms are rash, tiredness, nausea, and vomiting. Symptoms of more serious illness are eye pain, headache, stiff neck, trouble walking, weakness, seizures, paralysis, and coma.

## **How Is West Nile Virus Infection Diagnosed?**

The health care provider makes a diagnosis from the medical history, physical examination, and blood tests. For symptoms related to the nervous system, the doctor may take a small amount of cerebrospinal fluid (spinal tap) to look for infection. The health care provider may want

computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the head if the diagnosis is unclear.

### **How Is West Nile Virus Infection Treated?**

Treatment isn't usually needed, but the health care provider may prescribe medicine for symptoms. Over-the-counter medicines can help mild headaches and muscle aches. For more serious infections, a hospital stay is needed. Most people get better in 3 to 6 days, but those with brain infections may need several weeks. Some people with serious infections may have long-lasting symptoms.

Prevention of another infection is important. To do this, insect repellent with DEET should be used on uncovered skin, clothes, and window, door, and tent screens. Repellents containing more than 10% DEET shouldn't be used for children. Carriers and strollers for babies younger than 2 months should have mosquito netting used instead of DEET. Prevent mosquitoes from breeding by getting rid of small pools of standing water, such as in clogged drains, rain gutters, flowerpots, old tires, and swimming pool covers. Avoid areas with mosquitoes. Stay indoors during when mosquitoes are most active, or wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors. Use screens at home or in tents.

### **DOs and DON'Ts in Managing West Nile Virus Infection**

- ✓ **DO** follow your doctor's advice.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider about your medical problems.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider if you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

✓ **DO** call your health care provider right away or go to the emergency room if your symptoms get worse; if you have a headache, neck pain, or eye pain; or if bright lights bother your eyes.

⊗ **DON'T** stop taking your medicine because you feel better.

⊗ **DON'T** donate blood or organs if you've been infected with West Nile virus even after you're all better. People who get organs from donors who were infected with West Nile virus are at risk of developing encephalitis, meningitis, and other serious infections.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Tel: (404) 639-3534 or (800) 311-3435;  
Website: <http://www.cdc.gov>

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