

WEST NILE FACT SHEET

What is West Nile?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a virus spread by mosquitoes in bird populations that may result in human illness. It is commonly found in Africa, West and Central Asia, and the Middle East. The virus was first recognized in the United States in 1999 as the cause of human illness in metropolitan New York City. It is not known how the virus was first introduced into the United States, but since the initial appearance it has spread rapidly through eastern states and was found in Colorado in 2002.

How is West Nile virus transmitted?

The transmission of WNV involves several species of mosquitoes and birds. Mosquitoes become infected with WNV when they feed on a bird carrying the virus in its blood. The virus can then be transmitted to another bird, person, or other animal that the mosquito bites. Female mosquitoes can also pass the virus to eggs and adults can emerge already infectious. WNV is **NOT** transmitted from person-to-person like colds or flu.

What are the symptoms of West Nile illness?

Most people who are infected with WNV will not develop symptoms. A minority of infected persons will develop an illness with fever, headache, body aches, and sometimes skin rash and swollen glands 3 to 15 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. Symptoms of a mild disease will last a few days.

WNV infection seldom results in a severe illness known as West Nile meningitis or West Nile encephalitis. Encephalitis is an inflammation of the brain that may be marked by headache, high fever, stiff neck, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis. Symptoms of severe disease may last several weeks, although neurological effects may be permanent. A small number of cases have been fatal.

Who is at risk for West Nile virus illness?

In areas where WNV transmission is occurring, human illness does occur but is relatively rare. The risk of West Nile meningitis or encephalitis (the severe form of disease) is higher for persons 50 years of age and older.

Are other animals at risk?

Cases of WNV disease in horses has been documented and most horses infected with WNV recover. However, equine WNV cases can result in the death of the horse. The occurrence of horse cases in an area can indicate an increased risk to humans. Contact your veterinarian for specific vaccination information or to report suspected cases. WNV does not appear to cause extensive illness in dogs or cats. Contact your veterinarian for specific animal health concerns

What is the human risk of West Nile in Teller County?

In 2003, WNV was reported in most Colorado counties including the Eastern plains (like El Paso County) and on the West slope in the Grand Valley. This follows a historic pattern of similar mosquito-borne encephalitis outbreaks in the State although data is limited. Teller County is participating in the Colorado Department of Health and Environment WNV surveillance program. In 2003 WNV was found in a bird and horse in Teller County. However, no human cases were reported in Teller County in 2003. In general, the lack of significant mosquito breeding factors such as irrigation water or major rivers and the effects of altitude or temperature **may** reduce human risk in Teller County. Updates will be posted on the Teller County Web Site. In any case, it is important to keep WNV risk in perspective and know how to protect yourself.

How can I protect myself from West Nile Virus?

Prevention and personal protection is the best strategy.

Avoid mosquito bites

Whenever possible, wear protective clothing such as long sleeves, long pants, and socks while outdoors when mosquitoes are active. Consider staying indoors between dusk and dawn, which is peak mosquito biting time. Avoid activities in areas where mosquitoes are plentiful. Fix or install window and door screens to keep mosquitoes out of buildings.

Apply insect repellent to exposed skin while outdoors when mosquitoes are active. Repellents containing DEET are effective, but should be applied sparingly. Use care in applying repellent to children: don't put repellent on their hands, and be careful to avoid their mouths and eyes. Products containing 10% or less DEET are the most appropriate for children aged 2 - 12 years. **Always read and follow the product directions when using any insect repellent or insecticide!**

Avoid breeding mosquitoes

Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water. To avoid helping mosquitoes breed, drain standing water. Routinely empty water from flowerpots, pet bowls, clogged rain gutters, discarded tires, buckets, barrels, cans, and other items that collect water in which mosquitoes can lay eggs. Consider controlling mosquitoes in standing water with nontoxic BTI or native fish species. More information at: <http://www.fightthebitecolorado.com/supplies.htm>

Support disease-tracking activities

Teller County is tracking the occurrence of West Nile virus infections in birds. This relies on people reporting dead and dying birds. Generally, the State Lab will test magpies, ravens, crows and jays (Corvids). <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/zoonosis/wnv/corvidsubmission.pdf> for pictures.

Even though the State will not test all birds Teller County is tracking bird deaths. **Please report dead or dying birds to Teller County Environmental Health Department at 687-3048.** Avoid touching dead birds, or any dead animal, with your bare hands. Use gloves, an inverted plastic bag or shovel to place the carcass in a plastic bag.

Report mosquito breeding areas

In Teller County we have limited data regarding areas of significant mosquito breeding. You can assist by reporting mosquito breeding areas. This information will be useful in identifying human health risk.

For additional information contact:

Teller County Environmental Health
540 Manor Ct.
PO Box 1886
Woodland Park, CO 80866
(719) 687-3048

Colorado Health Education Hotline: 1-877-462-2911

Web Sites

Colorado Department of Health West Nile Web Site: <http://www.fightthebitecolorado.com/>

Colorado Department of Agriculture West Nile Web Site: <http://www.ag.state.co.us/>

Center For Disease Control Web Site: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/>

Teller County Web Site: <http://www.co.teller.co.us>