

FAST FACTS ABOUT WEST NILE VIRUS

Q. What is the West Nile virus?

A. West Nile virus is a flavivirus commonly found in Africa, the Middle East and West Asia. It was first detected in the United States in 1999. Since then it has spread to almost every state including Oregon.

Q. How is it spread?

A. West Nile virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. The virus is known to have infected people, birds, horses, cats, dogs and some other animals such as chipmunks, bats, skunks, squirrels and domestic rabbits.

Q. Do all mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus?

A. No. Of the 53 known mosquito species in the northwest United States, only a small number have the potential to carry West Nile virus. The mosquito species responsible for transmitting the West Nile virus, such as Culex species and Aedes species, are not common to wetlands. In-

stead, they prefer highly organic watery areas, such as leaf-clogged gutters and unattended birdbaths.

Q. What are the symptoms of illness associated with West Nile virus?

A. Current estimates indicate that only about 20 percent of people who become infected will develop any type of illness. Mild symptoms (called West Nile fever) can include fever, headache and body aches, swollen lymph glands, and a skin rash. Severe symptoms (called West Nile encephalitis, meningitis and meningoencephalitis) can include high fever, headache and neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis. The incubation period in humans (the time between being infected and the onset of symptoms) is 3-14 days.

Q. How do I protect myself from infection?

A. Preventive measures you can

take include using a mosquito repellent containing DEET that provides protection for the amount of time you will be outdoors. You should be sure to follow all application instructions to avoid irritating your skin, eyes and mouth, or using too much on young children. When outdoors it's also a good idea to wear long-sleeved shirts and full-length pants. However, mosquitoes can bite through thin clothing, so you also may want to spray your clothing with a repellent. It's also a good precaution to place mosquito netting over infant carriers.

Q. Can I get infected by handling or caring for a sick animal?

A. There currently is no conclusive evidence that West Nile virus can be spread from animals to people. However, you should contact your veterinarian on infection control precautions when caring for a sick animal.

Q. Are duck and other wild-game hunters at particular risk for getting infected?

A. Hunters (as well as all other outdoor recreators) may be at risk if they become bitten by mosquitoes in areas where West Nile virus is known to be active. There currently is no conclusive evidence that West Nile virus can be transmitted to humans by consuming infected birds or other animals. However, hunters always should follow the usual safety precautions when handling and cleaning animals to prevent blood exposure to bare hands, and always should follow procedures for fully cooking meat to prevent infections from both viruses and bacteria.

Q. Should I report dead birds?

A. You should immediately report dead birds to your local or state health agency or ODFW office. Those agencies will determine if the situation meets the criteria for testing the birds for the presence of West Nile virus.

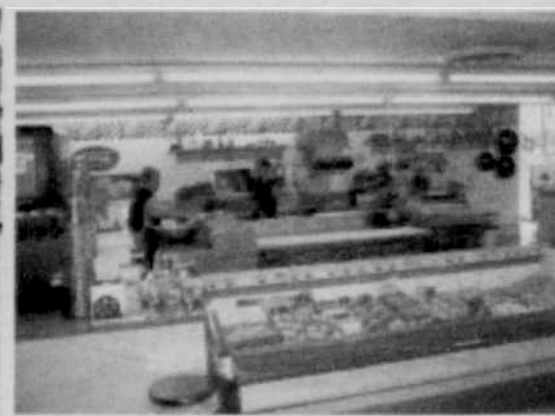
For more information, contact your local health department or ODFW office.



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