



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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West Nile Virus

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a viral illness spread by mosquitoes. It mainly affects birds, but humans, horses, cattle, reptiles, and other animals, can also become ill. It was first discovered in Africa in 1937, and first appeared in the US in 1999 in New York. It spread quickly westward across the continental US and by 2004, all states had reported WNV activity except for Alaska and Hawaii. Health and wildlife agencies in Hawaii are working to prevent the spread of the virus to the state.

How do you get it?

WNV is a bird virus and is spread from bird to bird by infected mosquitoes. When an infected mosquito bites a human, that person can be infected with WNV. Uncommon routes of infection include blood transfusions, organ transplants and breastfeeding. WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person infected with the virus.

What are the symptoms of WNV?

Most people who are infected with WNV will have no symptoms at all. Twenty percent of those infected will have symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting and a rash on the chest and back. Even fewer people infected with WNV will develop severe illness, which may include encephalitis (brain inflammation) and require hospitalization or cause permanent brain damage.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms usually begin between 3 and 14 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for WNV. In mild cases of illness, the fever and aches will go away by themselves. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) for the fever and aches and bed rest are all that is required. Severe

cases may require hospitalization for supportive care.

What is the risk of getting sick from WNV?

People over the age of 50 are more likely to have severe illness from WNV infections. The more exposure you have to infected mosquitoes will also increase your risk of becoming ill. The risk of getting WNV through medical procedures is very low. All donated blood is tested for WNV before it is given to patients.

How can you keep from getting it?

Mosquito proof your home and yard. Keep your yard free of standing water that could provide breeding sites for mosquitoes. Keep mosquitoes out of your home by making sure you have well-fitting screens on doors and windows.

When traveling to areas that have WNV, try to avoid exposure to mosquitoes.

Be involved in community efforts to clean up mosquito breeding sites in vacant lots, parks and other areas in your neighborhood.

Use mosquito repellents and wear appropriate clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and long pants that reduce exposure to mosquito bites.

Report dead birds to the Department of Health by calling 2-1-1 or reporting online at www.gotdeadbird.org. . Dead birds may be a sign that WNV is infecting birds in an area. DOH tests many species of birds to see if WNV caused their deaths. Further information on how to do this is available by calling 2-1-1 or visiting the Department of Health's website at www.hawaii.gov/health (follow the West Nile/Dead Bird Information link).

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>