



West Nile Virus – A Closer Look

You have probably heard about West Nile Virus on television or in the newspapers. It is important to understand the facts about the disease as well as to know the easy steps you can take to protect yourself and your family.

- West Nile Virus is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause encephalitis or meningitis in humans and other animals. The virus first appeared in the United States during a 1999 outbreak in New York that killed seven people.
- West Nile virus is spread to birds, humans, horses and other mammals through the bite of an infected mosquito. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito do not get sick.
- People who do get sick usually suffer a mild flu-like illness.
- The elderly are at the greatest risk of serious illness or death from this disease.
- There have been several dead birds that have tested positive for the disease in our community, but no human cases at this time.



The Real West Nile Virus Story – Myths and Facts

Myth: Everyone who gets bitten by an infected mosquito will contract West Nile Virus.

Fact: Only a very small percentage of mosquitoes are infected with the West Nile Virus and less than 1% of the people bitten by an infected mosquito will become seriously ill.

Myth: Everyone is equally likely to contract West Nile Virus if exposed to the disease.

Fact: Individuals over 50 years of age are at highest risk.

Myth: All water sources are a good breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Fact: Mosquitoes prefer quiet, stagnant and shallow deposits of water to insure proper larval development. Some sources are less likely to produce mosquitoes. If the water in a ditch is flowing it is not likely to produce mosquitoes.

Myth: All standing water represents a source for mosquito breeding.

Fact: If the water stands for less than a week it will not breed mosquitoes.

Myth: All standing water is the responsibility of local government to address.

Fact: If the water is not on public land and is not caused by some public construction or drainage activity then the situation is the responsibility of the property owner.

Myth: Widespread spraying is an effective means of managing the mosquito population.

Fact: Aerial spraying kills only the adult mosquitoes flying during the time the actual spraying is taking place, is costly, and keeping the mosquito population down means spraying several times throughout spring and summer. Even that does not guarantee the mosquitoes will be killed. Dense vegetation associated with roadside trees, shrubs, or hedges can interfere with insecticide applications. The best line of defense is to remove standing water where mosquitoes breed, apply larvicides where feasible and practical, and use personal protection measures.

Myth: The health department wants all dead birds to be submitted for testing.

Fact: The health department would like to be notified of unusual bird deaths in the community by calling their office at 972-6259, and may choose to sample certain species.

Learn More About West Nile Virus

Virginia Dept. of Health
www.vdh.state.va.us

Virginia Cooperative Extension
www.ext.vt.edu

Albemarle County
www.albemarle.org

City of Charlottesville
www.charlottesville.org

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
www.cdc.gov