

Spring 2008

## **WNV Information for Seniors**

### **What is West Nile Virus?**

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a virus carried by mosquitoes that infects mainly birds. Other animals including people can also be infected.

### **Why should seniors be concerned about WNV?**

Every year since 2002 people in Toronto have been infected with WNV. Seniors are most at risk of having a severe infection even if they are healthy. The risk of infection is low. For the population as a whole less than 1% of people infected become ill enough to be hospitalized. About 1 in 5 people who are infected will feel sick but will recover on their own. For seniors the risk of a severe outcome from infection would be higher than 1%.

### **What are the symptoms of West Nile Virus?**

The majority of people infected with WNV show no symptoms. About one in five people infected with WNV have mild, flu-like symptoms such as fever, headaches, and body aches that may be accompanied by a skin rash and swollen glands. Symptoms usually occur 3 to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Those over the age of 55 and people with compromised immune systems are at higher risk of illness. Symptoms of severe infection include stiff neck, confusion, disorientation, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. Anyone suffering extreme swelling or infection from a mosquito bite, or any of the above symptoms should seek medical attention.

### **How do I use mosquito repellents safely?**

Seniors can reduce their risk of WNV by eliminating stagnant water around the home and avoiding mosquito bites. You should take extra care to avoid mosquitoes if you spend a lot of time outdoors doing things like gardening or are out at night, especially from dusk or dawn. Below are some ways to avoid mosquito bites.

- Use fine-mesh screens on windows and doors. Make sure screens fit tightly and do not have holes.
- If possible avoid areas with mosquitoes or leave an area if mosquitoes are there.
- Wear light-coloured clothing, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks outdoors whenever possible (make sure clothing is breathable and allows moisture to evaporate).
- Wear insect repellents especially when mosquitoes are more likely to be found. Follow product instructions. Repellents containing 10% DEET or less are good for most uses. Repellents containing higher concentrations of DEET last longer but are no more effective.

**For more information call 416-338-7600 or visit our web site @ [www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health)**