

Spring 2008

### **Information for Schools, Child Care Centres and Camps**

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

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne virus that infects birds, some animals and humans. The risk of infection is low, and fewer than 1% of people who are infected become seriously ill.

#### **What is the risk to children?**

Children are not at greater risk of illness from WNV. Those over the age of 55 and people with compromised immune systems are at higher risk. The mosquitoes that carry WNV are active from early evening until early morning. Parents and caregivers should take precautions to protect children during these times.

#### **How can children be protected against WNV?**

To protect children from mosquito bites, follow these precautions:

- Wear light-coloured clothing, long-sleeve shirts, long pants and socks whenever possible. Pant legs can be tucked into socks for extra protection.
- Make sure clothing is breathable and allows moisture to evaporate.
- Wear insect repellents containing 10% DEET or less in areas where mosquitoes are likely to be found. Always follow product instructions.
- Apply only to exposed skin and clothing. Use just enough to cover skin/clothing.
- Take precautions when out at night, especially during dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Take extra care in areas with a large number of mosquitoes (e.g. wooded areas).
- Remove standing water around your home, child care centre or camp where feasible, to reduce mosquito breeding sites. Put away objects that may collect water, such as toys or buckets, to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in children's play areas. Change water in birdbaths twice weekly.

## **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 three to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Some people are at higher risk of complications from WNV, especially those with compromised immune systems due to illnesses such as cancer, diabetes or heart disease. Symptoms of severe infection include stiff neck, confusion, severe headache, and sudden sensitivity to light. Anyone suffering extreme swelling or infection from a mosquito bite, or any of the above symptoms, should seek medical attention.

## **Can repellent and sunscreen be used together?**

Insect repellent may reduce the effectiveness of sunscreen. When using them together, sunscreen should be applied 20 minutes before outdoor activities, and then repellent just before going into an area with mosquitoes. Children should cover up and wear a hat to ensure protection from the sun. Products that combine insect repellent and sunscreen are not recommended.

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

Always follow product instructions. Apply repellent lightly to exposed skin and to clothing. Never use over cuts, wounds and sunburned or irritated skin. Avoid applying to children's hands, face and eyes. If repellent gets in the eyes, rinse with water right away. When using a spray, avoid breathing it in, and always spray in a well-ventilated area. Don't spray near food. Avoid prolonged use and wash repellent off daily. Health Canada recommends the following:

### **Children under six months of age**

- Do NOT use insect repellents containing DEET
- Use mosquito netting and avoid the outdoors during dusk and dawn

### **Children six months to two years**

- Use a product containing 10% DEET or less
- Maximum of one application per day

### **Children two to 12 years of age**

- Use a product containing 10% DEET or less
- Maximum of three applications per day

### **Other repellents**

- Some repellents containing alternatives to DEET such as products with soyabean oil, or pmenthane- 3,8-diol, are approved by Health Canada. Check product instructions as some products are not safe for children under three.

### **Adults and children 12 years of age and older**

- Toronto Public Health recommends products containing 10% DEET or less because studies show that lower concentrations of DEET are just as effective, although they don't last as long. Health Canada considers any product containing up to 30% DEET safe for persons 12 years of age and older.
- Re-apply after the protection time listed on the product has elapsed.

### **Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers**

- There is no evidence that the use of DEET by a pregnant woman harms the fetus or affects a nursing child through breast milk. However, non-chemical methods to reduce mosquito bites can be considered.

### **Can children bring insect repellents to schools, child care centres and camps?**

These products should be kept away from young children. Groups and child care centres may establish guidelines and consent forms for product use. Older children may be taught how to use the products safely.

### **What should children do if they find a dead bird?**

Do not touch dead birds with bare hands. Call Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 for further information on disposal of dead birds.

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

The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care @ [www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca).

Health Canada @ [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)