

Fact Sheet for Animal Owners

West Nile Virus (WNV)

This Fact Sheet is intended for owners, custodians, and/or handlers of horses or other animals that have been diagnosed with WNV infection by a veterinarian. For questions about your health, please contact your health care provider.

What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a virus spread by mosquitoes and is found throughout many parts of the world, including Ontario.

How is WNV spread? Can I get WNV from my infected animal or someone else who is infected?

WNV is spread between birds by mosquitoes. Mosquitoes that become infected from biting birds can sometimes bite humans or horses and spread WNV infection to them.

You cannot get WNV from an infected animal or someone else who has WNV. As well, a mosquito cannot become infected from biting a human or horse that has WNV.

What is the risk of WNV to other people in the area?

Ontario has experienced human and horse cases of WNV every summer since 2002. As the main mosquito that spreads WNV (*Culex pipiens*) is found in cities, there is greater risk of WNV infection in cities compared to rural areas; however, there have been WNV infected humans and horses as well as infected mosquitoes in rural areas.

Each year we can expect horses and humans to be infected with WNV.

Is there a vaccine available for people or animals?

There is no vaccine available for people. There is a vaccine available for horses.

If you are interested in having your horse vaccinated, contact your local veterinarian.

How can I protect myself from getting WNV?

To protect yourself from getting WNV:

- use insect repellent,
- wear long-sleeve light-colour clothing,
- avoid being outdoors during times of the day when mosquitoes are most active (primarily dusk and dawn),
- avoid areas where mosquitoes are known to occur,
- ensure the screens in your house are in good repair
- remove standing water from around your house

For further information on personal protection against mosquitoes, see Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care resources at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/west-nile-virus>.

What are the symptoms that I need to look out for?

Most people who become infected with WNV will not develop any symptoms. However, about 2 in 10 people infected with WNV may develop symptoms that include fever, headache, body aches, joint pain, rash, vomiting and/or diarrhea. It can take a few days to two weeks after being bitten by a WNV-infected mosquito for symptoms to develop. Less commonly, a severe form of WNV illness can affect the nervous system. Although severe illness can occur in anyone with WNV, it is more likely to occur in those who are older or have other medical conditions. One in 10 patients with severe WNV affecting the nervous system can die.

If you are concerned about your health, please contact your health care provider.

Is there treatment or medication that I can take for WNV illness?

There is no specific treatment for WNV illness. People with WNV illness receive supportive treatment.

What is being done to track and control the possible spread of the virus?

As part of Ontario's WNV surveillance program, mosquitoes are captured and tested for WNV. Cases of WNV in humans are monitored. WNV cases in horses are reported to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs. Public education on how to prevent mosquito bites and WNV is provided.

Why is this information important to me?

As there is evidence of local transmission of WNV in the area, it is important to know what this virus is and what you can do to protect yourself and others.

Where can I get more information?

Please contact your local public health unit:

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx>

For further information on WNV in horses, please see:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/horses/westnile.htm>

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