



Maine West Nile Virus: General Information

(Adapted from materials supplied by the New York State Bureau of Health)

updated 3/11/04

West Nile Virus History

Since 1999 when West Nile virus was first identified in New York City, the virus has spread to a total of 45 States. In 2003, there was close to 3,000 cases of severe illness and 230 deaths attributed to WNV nationwide. In Maine during 2003, 98 birds from throughout the state tested positive for West Nile Virus. To date, there have not been any reported cases of WNV in humans in Maine.

The Maine Bureau of Health and other State agencies are working to improve awareness about this new disease and to suggest ways in which Mainers can protect themselves and their families from this mosquito borne infection.

Mosquito Facts

Mosquitoes are small flying insects that feed on human and animal blood or plant juices. Only female mosquitoes bite to get a blood meal for their growing eggs. Mosquitoes are generally considered a nuisance pest, but occasionally can transmit disease. While there are about 40 different mosquitoes in Maine, most mosquitoes do not transmit West Nile virus.

Where They Live and Breed

Many types of mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water around the home. Weeds, tall grass and shrubbery provide an outdoor home for adult mosquitoes, which also may enter houses through unscreened windows or doors, or broken screens. Many mosquitoes will breed in containers that hold water, such as flower pots or discarded tires.

Symptoms of West Nile Virus

Mild cases of West Nile infection may include a slight fever and/or headache. Severe infections are marked by a rapid onset of a high fever, head and body aches, which usually occur five to 15 days after exposure. There is no specific treatment of viral infections, other than to treat the symptoms and provide supportive care. Those who are at highest risk of becoming seriously ill from West Nile virus infection are persons who are over the age of 50. Healthy children and adults are at very low risk for infection.

When Mosquitoes Are Most Active

Some mosquitoes are most active between dusk and dawn when the air is calm, and that is when the females are most likely to bite. However, others will feed at any time of day.

Reporting Dead Birds

Keeping track of the number of dead birds helps public health officials monitor the human health risk for West Nile virus. If you see a dead bird, contact the toll free Bird Reporting Line at 1-888-697-5846. Note: Even though not all dead birds will be collected or tested, all reports will be recorded and will help public health officials monitor the spread of West Nile virus in Maine.

Protecting Your Home

Mosquitoes can develop in any standing water that lasts more than 4 days. To reduce the mosquito population around your home and property, reduce or eliminate all standing water and debris by:

- Disposing of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers.
- Clearing brush from around your home
- Removing all discarded tires on your property. Used tires have become the most common mosquito-breeding site in the country.
- Drilling holes in the bottoms of recycling containers that are kept outdoors.
- Making sure roof gutters drain properly, and cleaning clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Turning over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Changing the water in birdbaths
- Cleaning vegetation and debris from the edges of ponds.
- Cleaning and chlorinating swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs.
- Draining water from pool covers.
- Using landscaping to eliminate stagnant water that collects on your property.

Protecting Yourself

Most mosquitoes in Maine do not transmit disease. Unless you are at high risk for infection, it is not necessary to limit any outdoor activities. Those who are at highest risk of becoming seriously ill from West Nile virus infection are the elderly and persons with weakened immune systems.

- Avoid being outdoors at dusk and dawn, the times when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors for long periods of time.
- Consider the use of mosquito repellent, according to directions, when it is necessary to be outdoors.
- Make sure all windows and doors in your home have screens, and that all screens are in good repair.

For more information about West Nile virus contact the Bureau of Health, Division of Disease Control at (800) 821-5821 or visit our web address at <http://www.state.me.us/dhs/boh/ddc/westnile.htm>