



West Nile Virus: Advice on Personal Protection

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

Updated 3/11/04

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.

Although the chances of a person becoming ill are small, there are some simple steps you can take to reduce this risk. The Maine Bureau of Health and other state agencies are working to improve awareness about West Nile Virus. This handout provides the public with information on how to protect themselves and their families from the mosquito born infection.

You can reduce your risk of mosquito bites by adopting the following personal protection measures:

- Avoid being outdoors during peak periods of mosquito activity, such as dawn and dusk.
- Wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when mosquitoes are most active.
- Consider using a mosquito repellent, according to directions on the label.

CONTROL MOSQUITOES IN AND AROUND YOUR HOME

Many mosquitoes need standing water to lay their eggs. To reduce the mosquito population in and around your home, reduce or eliminate standing water by:

- Disposing of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers.
- Removing all leaf debris and keeping brush trimmed.
- Drilling holes in the bottoms of all 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 bird baths and animal dishes frequently.
- Regularly cleaning and chlorinating swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs.
- Draining water from pool covers.
- Using landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property.

The Maine Bureau of Health is using dead bird sightings and laboratory testing of birds to help track West Nile virus. If you see a dead bird, call toll-free: 1-888-697-5846 to report the incident. Although limited funding is available to test a selected number of birds, dead bird reports can be used for monitoring the spread of the virus within Maine.

Proper Use of DEET

DEET - - the chemical N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide - is an insect repellent that can reduce the risk of mosquito bites but must be used with caution. Be aware of the possible adverse health effects when making decisions about DEET. Products containing DEET have been occasionally associated with some health problems (skin reactions, including rash, swelling and itching; eye irritation; and, less frequently, slurred speech, confusion and seizures) when used in excessive amounts. The Bureau of Health recommends the following precautions when using repellents containing DEET:

- Store out of the reach of children and read all instructions on the label before applying.
- Do NOT allow young children to apply DEET themselves.
- Do NOT apply DEET directly to children. Apply to your own hands and then put it on the child. (According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, repellents used on children should contain no more than 10 percent DEET).
- When applying DEET, avoid the child's face and hands.
- Avoid prolonged and excessive use of DEET. Use sparingly to cover exposed skin: do NOT treat unexposed skin. Adults should use no more than 30% concentration of DEET.
- Do NOT apply repellents in enclosed areas.
- Do NOT apply directly to your face.
- DEET can be applied to clothing, but may damage some synthetic fabrics and plastics.
- Wash all treated skin and clothing after returning indoors.
- If you believe you or a child is having an adverse reaction to a repellent containing DEET, wash the treated area immediately and call your health care provider or local poison control center.

For more information about West Nile virus contact the Bureau of Health, Division of Disease Control at (207) 287-5301 or visit our website at <http://www.state.me.us/dhs/boh/ddc/westnile.htm>