



West Nile Virus

What you need to know...

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne disease that can cause encephalitis. Mosquitoes spread the virus after they feed on infected birds, and then bite people, other birds and animals.

How do I know if WNV is in my area?

Infected mosquitoes and birds serve as indicators to detect WNV in our community. Through ongoing surveillance, HCPH Mosquito Control Division monitors for WNV in mosquito and bird populations. The data collected assists in making decisions on possible control activities. When an area in Harris County is confirmed positive for WNV, the public is notified through media outlets (television, newspaper and radio) and the HCPH website.

Who is most at risk?

People over 50 years of age have the highest risk of developing a severe illness because as we age, our bodies have a harder time fighting off disease. People with compromised or undeveloped immune systems are also at increased risk; however, anyone can get the virus. Less than 1% of people who get bitten will become infected.

What are the symptoms of WNV infection?

Most people bitten by infected mosquitoes do not develop any symptoms. When symptoms of infection do occur, they usually appear 5-15 days from the time you were bitten. Most people who are infected, show no or only mild symptoms such as: low grade fever, headache, and occasionally swollen lymph glands. More severe signs and symptoms can include: high fever, stiff neck, muscle weakness, disorientation, brain inflammation (encephalitis), coma and rarely, death. There is no specific treatment for WNV; however, in more severe cases, intensive supportive therapy is needed. If you think you have been infected with WNV contact your health care provider.

What can I do to reduce my risk of getting WNV?

- Use mosquito repellent when outdoors. Use according to the label – less than 10% DEET for children. Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR3535 are also recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Eliminate standing water which can be found in old tires, cans and blocked gutters.
- Do not sweep lawn clippings into storm sewers or drains.
- Make sure screens on windows and doors are in good condition.
- Maintain swimming pools. Empty, invert or cover swimming pools when not in use.
- Keep birdbaths clean. Change the water at least once a week, more often in the summer.
- Wear long pants and long sleeved shirts (preferably light colored) when outdoors particularly during dusk and dawn.
- To control mosquitoes inside a house, use a “flying insect spray”. Be sure to use according to directions on the label.

What should I do if I find a dead bird?

Contact the HCPH Mosquito Control Division Dead Bird Hotline at (713) 440-3036 or visit our website at www.hcphtx.org.

If the dead bird requires testing will it be picked up?

Yes. For those unable to drop off dead birds, HCPH Mosquito Control Division will pick up all testable dead birds regardless of species from all areas of Harris County. Please note dead birds must meet testing criteria.

What should I do with the dead bird until it is picked up for testing?

If the bird cannot be reported or picked up right away, wear gloves to double-bag the bird and place it in a refrigerator or ice chest that is not used for food. If that is not possible, wear gloves to double-bag the bird and cover it with ice until it is picked up.

What should I do if I am told the dead bird does not require testing?

If testing is not required, wear gloves to double-bag the dead bird and dispose of it in the trash.

Wild birds may carry diseases that are contagious to humans. Therefore, only by using appropriate precautions should people handle sick, injured, or dead wildlife. It is important to note that a single dead bird may not mean WNV. Window and domestic cat-kills are still the main cause of bird deaths around our homes and communities.

When will I receive the test results of the bird(s) I submitted for testing?

Although test results will not be provided to individuals submitting dead birds, the efforts to report them for testing are an important part of WNV surveillance in our community. Information on birds testing positive for WNV will be available on our website.

Additional Resources

Texas Department of State Health Services:

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/disease/arboviral/westNile/>

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention:

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm

For more information contact:

Harris County Public Health

Mosquito Control Division

3330 Old Spanish Trail, Bldg. D

Houston, Texas 77021-2230

Phone: (713) 440-4800 • Fax: (713) 440-4795

www.hcphtx.org

