

Prevention of West Nile virus begins with protecting yourself

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds residents that preventing mosquito bites is the most effective way to avoid West Nile virus disease. Although there have not been any human cases of West Nile virus (WNV) reported to the NDDoH so far this year, there is risk of contracting WNV anytime mosquitoes are active.

“People get WNV through the bite of an infected mosquito,” said Evan Bischoff, WNV Surveillance Coordinator. “There is no human vaccine for WNV and there are no specific treatments for the disease, so it is important to protect yourself and your family from mosquito bites.”

Take these precautions to avoid mosquito bites:

- Use insect repellent registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that contain ingredients such as DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, PMD, and permethrin (clothing only). Always follow the directions on the manufacturer’s label for safe and effective use.
- Wear protective clothing outdoors such as long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks.
- Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes that can carry WNV are most likely to bite.
- Eliminate stagnant water in containers around homes where mosquitoes can lay their eggs (e.g. gutters, buckets, flower pots, old tires, wading pools and birdbaths).
- Install or repair screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of your residence.
- Maintain a well-trimmed yard and landscape around your home.

Most people infected with West Nile virus experience no symptoms. Those who develop symptoms will commonly report fever, headache, body/joint aches or rash. People who develop severe illness may experience stiff neck, altered mental status, paralysis, coma and possibly death. People over 60, or those who have underlying health issues are at greater risk for developing West Nile neuroinvasive disease, a serious and sometimes fatal disease. In 2018, there were 204 North Dakota residents with WNV disease. Of those, 61 were hospitalized and two people died.

For more information about West Nile virus, contact Michelle Dethloff, NDDoH, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/wnv.

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