

Monterey County Health Department Preparedness Minute

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West Nile Virus—Update

West Nile virus is a virus carried by mosquitoes. The virus can cause serious illness in humans. The virus has been found in the Middle East, Africa, and West Asia since the 1930s and was first found in the United States in 1999.



West Nile first appeared in California in 2003, and is here to stay. Monterey County Health Department continues to monitor for the virus through a surveillance system that includes humans, horses, and surveillance and testing of mosquitoes, sentinel chicken flocks and dead birds. In addition, mosquito control and prevention activities continue to target mosquito breeding grounds.

How do you get West Nile Virus?



You can get West Nile virus if an infected mosquito bites you. Most people are bitten doing everyday activities around their own home like gardening, sitting outside, and barbecuing. Keeping mosquitoes from biting you reduces your risk of getting West Nile virus.

The virus is **not** spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus, or by breathing in the virus.

What are the Symptoms of West Nile Virus?

Symptoms of West Nile virus usually will appear 3 to 14 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Most people with the virus will not have any symptoms. Common symptoms include fever, headache, body aches, and sometimes skin rashes or swollen lymph nodes.

These symptoms may last a few days, but there are reports of prolonged fatigue and muscle weakness. Serious symptoms include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, muscle weakness, loss of vision, convulsions, numbness, and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks and can cause permanent nervous system damage. Seek medical attention right away if you have any of these symptoms.



West Nile virus infection can sometimes be fatal. There is no specific treatment for the infection and there is no human vaccine. Do not take a chance. While the risk of getting West Nile virus from a mosquito bite is small, it is easy to protect yourself from infection.

Can animals get sick from WNV?



Some species of wild birds, particularly crows and jays, are very susceptible to WNV and can die from the infection.

Horses are very susceptible to WNV and approximately one-third of horses that become ill die or are euthanized. An effective vaccine is available for horses and horse-owners should consult with a veterinarian about WNV vaccine and other vaccines against mosquito-borne viruses.

Dogs and cats rarely become ill when infected with WNV.

The purpose of this short publication is to inform Monterey County staff about preparedness issues ranging from emerging communicable diseases to personal preparedness. If there is a specific topic you or your staff are interested in please contact the Preparedness Program at klahnk@co.monterey.ca.us.

What can you do?

The public can play a key role in helping to assist the Health Department with tracking and preventing the spread of the West Nile Virus.

- ✓ Report dead birds (especially a crow, raven, magpie, jay, or hawk) to the Department of Health Services at www.westnile.ca.gov or through the West Nile Virus Dead Bird Hotline (877-WNV-BIRD).
- ✓ An effective vaccine is available for horses and horse-owners should consult with a veterinarian about the West Nile Virus vaccine and other vaccines against mosquito-borne viruses.
- ✓ When outdoors, use insect repellents containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-metoluamide). Follow the directions on the package.
- ✓ Mosquitoes that carry West Nile Virus are most active at dawn and dusk, especially during the two hours after sunset. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants if engaging in outdoor activities at these times.
- ✓ Make sure that doors and windows have tight fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.
- ✓ Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flowerpots, buckets, barrels and other containers.
- ✓ Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird baths weekly.



Mosquito Abatement & Reporting



Stock ornamental ponds and large water troughs for animals with mosquito fish. Call the Northern Salinas Valley Mosquito Abatement District at (831) 442-6438 for FREE mosquito fish.

Reporting standing water

Monitor your neighborhood for sources of standing water and if they appear to be on abandoned or unused property, report them:

North of Chualar call:

Northern Salinas Valley Mosquito Abatement District
Salinas (831) 422-6438
Monterey (831) 373-2483
Pajaro (831) 761-2438

South of Chualar call:

Monterey County Health Department
Division of Environmental Health
Salinas (831) 755-4508
Monterey (831) 647-7654
King City (831) 386-6899

Reporting a dead bird

Dead birds may be a sign that West Nile virus is circulating between birds and the mosquitoes in an area. Over 130 species of birds are known to have been infected with West Nile virus, though not all infected birds will die. It's important to remember that birds die from many other causes besides West Nile virus.

To report a dead bird go to www.westnile.ca.gov or call toll-free 1-877-WNV-BIRD or 1-877-968-2473.



This issue of *Preparedness Minute* is brought to you by the Monterey County Health Department's Preparedness Program. For More information Contact:

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