



West Nile Virus

If I live in an area where birds or mosquitoes with West Nile virus have been reported and a mosquito bites me, am I likely to get sick?

No, even in an area where mosquitoes do carry the virus, very few mosquitoes - 1 to 2 percent – are infected. If the mosquito is infected, less than one percent of all people who get bitten and become infected become severely ill. The chances that you will become severely ill from any one mosquito bite are extremely small.

What proportion of people with severe illness due to West Nile virus die?

Among those with severe illness due to West Nile virus, case fatality rates range from 3% - 15% and are highest among the elderly. Less than one percent of those infected with West Nile virus will develop severe illness. Most people who get infected do not develop any disease at all.

Who is at risk for getting West Nile encephalitis?

All residents of areas where virus activity has been identified are at risk of getting West Nile encephalitis; persons older than 50 years have the greatest risk of severe disease. It is unknown if immune-compromised persons are at increased risk for West Nile virus disease.

What are the symptoms of West Nile encephalitis?

Most infections are mild, and symptoms include fever, headache and body aches, occasionally with skin rash and swollen lymph glands. More severe infection may be marked by headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness and paralysis.

What can I do to reduce my risk of becoming infected with West Nile virus?

- stay indoors at dawn, dusk and in the early evening
- wear long sleeve shirts and pants whenever you are outdoors
- spray clothing with repellants containing permethrin or DEET since mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing
- apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin