



West Nile Virus



What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne virus of birds that also causes illness and death in horses and humans.

Where is it found?

West Nile virus was first identified in the United States in 1999 in New York City and subsequently spread to all 48 contiguous states by 2004. Transmission is seasonal with the majority of cases in Wyoming occurring in the late summer.

How is it spread?

West Nile Virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected when they feed on an infected bird. The infected mosquito then spreads WNV to humans and other animals when they bite.

What are some clinical signs of disease?

Birds with West Nile Virus often show neurological signs including loss of coordination, head tilt, tremors, weakness, and lethargy. Most mammals do not show clinical signs of this disease. Horses and humans are more likely than other animals to develop flu-like illness or signs of neurologic disease.

How does this disease affect me?

West Nile virus can cause serious, life-altering, and even fatal disease in humans. Precautions should be taken to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes particularly during the peak transmission periods of late August and early September. Humans can also be infected when conducting necropsies on infected birds. Most humans infected with the virus develop inapparent infections. Clinically ill people develop either West Nile Fever or the more severe WNV encephalitis. Clinical symptoms of West Nile Fever are usually mild and include fever, headache, body aches, and in some cases, skin rash and swollen lymph nodes. Clinical signs of WNV encephalitis include high fever, stiff neck, muscle weakness, convulsions, and paralysis.

Information for outdoor recreationists:

There is no vaccine to prevent WNV infection. The best way to prevent West Nile is to protect yourself from mosquito bites. Use insect repellent, wear long-sleeved shirts and pants, treat clothing and gear, and take steps to control mosquitoes indoors and outdoors.

Useful websites for further information about WNV:

CDC West Nile Fact Sheet https://www.cdc.gov/west-nile-virus/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/westnile/resources/pdfs/wnvFactsheet_508.pdf

Wyoming Department of Health

<https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/west-nile-virus/>

For additional information on West Nile Virus or any other wildlife disease, please contact the WGFD Wildlife Health Laboratory at 307-745-5865.