



West Nile Virus



It's that time of year! The arrival of British Columbia's warm summer climate means that mosquitoes are not far behind. Mosquitoes are usually only seen as a nuisance: their bites are uncomfortable and usually heal rather quickly. A small percentage of these bites, however, cause infections which can lead to more serious illnesses like West Nile Virus. Children, senior citizens, and individuals suffering from chronic illness should be especially aware.

Protect yourself and your family: covering up is the best prevention!

West Nile Virus Information Line

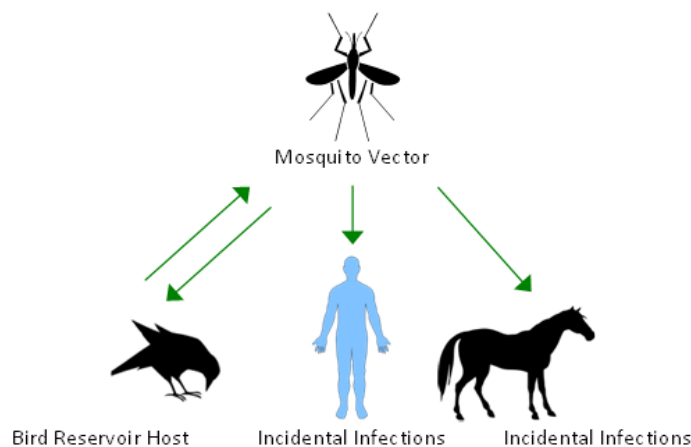
The Fraser Health Authority operates a toll-free line for general information on the West Nile Virus. Please call 1-888-WNV-LINE (1-888-968-5463).

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus is a mosquito-borne virus that can rarely cause *encephalitis*. The virus was named after the West Nile region of Uganda, where it first appeared in 1937. The risk of becoming seriously ill as a result of infection with West Nile Virus is low and most people who become infected experience no symptoms or have very mild illness.

How is the virus spread?

West Nile Virus is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected by biting an infected bird. In addition, it is believed that West Nile Virus may be transmitted through transplanted organs, blood transfusions and breast milk. The virus is not spread by direct person-to-person or animal-to-human contact.



How can I control mosquitoes in and around my home?

As most mosquitoes need standing water to lay their eggs, the best way to keep mosquitoes away is to clean up areas where they like to breed:



Standing Water

- * Dispose of or turn upside down water-holding, outdoor containers.
- * Empty standing water from used or discarded tires.
- * Drill holes in the bottom of unused container so water can't collect.
- * Turn over wheelbarrows.
- * Change the water in birdbaths weekly.
- * Cover rainwater barrels with a mesh or screen.
- * Don't allow any outside water to stand for more than a week.

Swimming or Wading Pools

- * Clean and chlorinate outdoor pools and hot tubs.
- * Immediately remove water that collects on pool covers.
- * Make sure the pool's pump is circulating water properly.
- * Turn over wading pools when not in use.
- * Aerate ornamental pools, stock them with fish, or change the water weekly.

Eaves and Drains

- * Clear leaves and twigs from eaves, storm and roof gutters throughout the summer.
- * Make sure drainage ditches are not clogged.
- * Check flat roofs frequently for standing water.

Yards and Lawns

- * Immediately dispose of lawn cuttings, raked leaves, or other decaying debris.
- * Remove fallen fruit or berries from the ground.
- * Turn over your compost frequently.
- * Fill in low depressions in lawn areas.
- * Clear out dense shrubbery where mosquitoes like to breed and rest.
- * Work with your neighbours to identify potential mosquito breeding areas.

Windows

- * Check window screens for holes and ensure they fit snugly into the window frame.
- * If you don't have screens, keep your windows closed between dusk and dawn.

Protect Yourself

Mosquitoes are most active between dusk and dawn. If you need to be outside during this time be sure to cover up: wear shoes, socks, long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Clothing should be lightly coloured and made of tightly woven materials. You may also consider using insect repellent. Keep these tips in mind:

- * Only use insect repellents that are registered in Canada and look for those that contain *DEET* (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide).
- * Read the repellent's directions carefully and ask your family physician for assistance if you have any questions.

- * Apply repellent sparingly on exposed skin surfaces or on top of clothing, never underneath clothing.
- * Do not use repellent on open wounds or irritated or sunburned skin.
- * Wash skin with soap and water when protection is no longer needed.
- * If the repellent enters your eyes, rinse them with water right away.
- * Avoid breathing the mist from spray-type repellent and apply in well-ventilated areas, never in a tent.
- * Do not use insect repellent near food.
- * Keep all insect repellent containers out of the reach of children.
- * Always supervise the application of repellent on children.
- * Check for sensitivity: apply repellent to a small area of skin on the arm and wait 24 hours before regular use.

How do I tell if a mosquito bite is serious?

Most mosquito bites cause itching and minor irritation. A small percentage can lead to serious infection such as West Nile Virus. If you have any of the following symptoms, seek medical help right away:

- * Fever
- * Muscle Weakness
- * Stiff Neck
- * Confusion
- * Severe Headache
- * Sudden Sensitivity to Light
- * Extreme Swelling or Infection at the Bite Site

What if I spot a dead bird?

Fraser Health and the BC Centre for Disease Control staff have a collection system in place for monitoring the number of dead corvids (crow, ravens, jays and magpies) to detect any increases in corvid mortality over space and time. This information is highly useful for West Nile Virus surveillance. The public does NOT have to report or collect dead birds. For more information, please contact the Fraser Valley Health Authority at 1-888-968-5463.

For more information, please visit...

BC Centre for Disease Control	www.bccdc.org
City of White Rock	www.city.whiterock.bc.ca
Fraser Valley Health Authority	www.fraserhealth.ca
Province of British Columbia	www.bchealthguide.org