

Mandatory safety talk

July 9, 2004

Fight the bite: West Nile Virus information and precautions

Managers must deliver this safety talk on West Nile Virus and associated protective measures to all available employees, beginning immediately and repeating as necessary until all employees have received this message.

It's time. West Nile virus activity is occurring in many parts of the country, including **(your district)**. Now is the time to start using repellent and eliminating mosquito breeding sites to protect yourself, your family and community from West Nile Virus (WNV).

WNV is a mosquito-borne infection that causes fever, rash, headache, nausea and vomiting, muscle pain, enlarged lymph glands and, occasionally in older individuals, encephalitis — an inflammation of the brain. Less than one percent of people infected with WNV develop encephalitis. Of those, fewer than fifteen percent are fatal.

The infection spreads between certain animals — mainly birds — and blood-sucking arthropods, such as mosquitoes, ticks and flies. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that is carrying the virus. WNV is not spread by person-to-person contact and it is not spread directly from birds to persons.

The incubation period — the time between when the disease is contracted, such as by mosquito bite, and when symptoms appear — ranges from three to 15 days.

If you are bitten by an infected mosquito, your chances of becoming ill are roughly one in 300. Most people who are infected either have no symptoms or may experience mild illness such as fever, headache, swollen glands and a mild rash before full recovery. And, once you have been infected with WNV, you are immune to further infections of it.

If you have a mosquito bite that is three to 15 days old, watch it carefully. See a doctor immediately if you develop symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, severe headaches or your eyes become sensitive to light. A blood test is used to assess for West Nile Virus.

The best way to prevent WNV infection is to avoid mosquito bites. Take the following precautions:

- Use insect repellants with no more than 30 percent DEET on exposed skin. DEET should not be used under clothing. Use 15 percent or less DEET for children. Do not use DEET on infants. When applying sunscreen and repellent, apply sunscreen first, then insect repellent. Reapply sunscreen on top of insect repellent as needed. There is no need for more than one application of DEET.

- When outdoors wear protective clothing such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts and socks.
- Empty water from outside objects such as bird baths, old tires and other containers in which water accumulates and mosquitoes can breed. Maintain swimming pools properly.
- Make sure that door- and window-screens do not have holes.
- Note: If your community is tracking dead birds, letter carriers can help by reporting dead birds through the local hotlines.

(Insert local hotline numbers, if appropriate.)

If you have any further questions or concerns call your Safety Manager or the local Public Health Department.