

What is the health risk to people from the West Nile Virus?

- SYMPTOMS of SERIOUS ILLNESS: fever, disorientation, muscle weakness, neck stiffness, headache, nausea
- RISK of SERIOUS ILLNESS: greater for older people and the immune-compromised
- CHILDREN ARE NOT PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE (few if any cases of serious illness have involved children)
- INCUBATION PERIOD: 3-14 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito
- CALL a DOCTOR if you or someone you care about shows symptoms of serious illness, whether or not caused by WNV
- TREAT the SYMPTOMS -- there is no vaccine or medication specific to WNV
- AUGUST & SEPTEMBER are when WNV has been most likely to bridge into the human population in the Northeast US. Human illness has occurred earlier in the Southeast and Gulf Coast states of the US in 2002
- "FLU-LIKE" SYMPTOMS have been reported by about 30% of infected people, but most of those infected do not get sick
- In US outbreaks, about 1 infected person in 150 has become seriously ill with central nervous system infection (encephalitis &/or meningitis)
- About 12% of hospitalized cases have been fatal (7 of 62 hospitalized in 1999, 2 of 20 in 2000, 9 of 64 in 2001,)
- Most mosquitoes bites will not lead to a WNV infection
- BIRDS are far more likely than people to become infected & sickened by West Nile Virus

In some areas where West Nile Virus is showing up for the third and fourth year, there is some complacency about taking precautionary and preventative measures. Although fortunately WNV has not caused widespread human mortality--as was initially feared by some--it can cause unpleasant (flu-like) and sometimes long-lasting symptoms in people. It also presents a serious risk to unvaccinated horses and has had a not-yet-fully-understood impact on susceptible wildlife (e.g., crows).