



DID YOU KNOW?

AN INFORMATION SHEET FOR ST. JOHN AMBULANCE MEMBERS

DID YOU KNOW that although the risk of illness from West Nile virus is low, and the risk of serious health effects is even lower for most Canadians, it is still important to know the symptoms of infection from the West Nile virus and how to minimize our risk?

What is the WN virus?

The West Nile (WN) virus is a mosquito-borne virus and is transmitted by mosquitoes after becoming infected by feeding on the blood of infected birds.

How do people get infected?

The evidence shows that most people infected with WN virus got it from the bite of an infected mosquito. People can also be infected in others ways, including blood transfusions and organ/tissue transplants although the risk is considered to be quite low. There is no evidence that the virus can be transmitted from an infected person to a health care worker who is treating them.

What are the symptoms and health effects of WN virus?

Evidence shows that many people infected with WN virus have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. When the infection does cause illness, symptoms generally appear within 2 to 15 days. In mild cases, people may have flu-like symptoms, including fever, headache, and body aches. Some may also develop a mild rash, or swollen lymph glands.

Some people, including older people, have weaker immune systems that put them at greater risk for serious health effects. In these cases, symptoms could include the rapid onset of severe headache, high fever, stiff neck, vomiting, drowsiness, confusion, muscle weakness and paralysis. Severe cases of illness due to WN virus can be fatal. Anyone who experiences the sudden onset of these symptoms should seek immediate medical attention.

What can we do to reduce our risk of WN virus infection?

You can take steps to reduce the risk of getting mosquito bites by taking the following precautions:

- Wear protective outdoor clothing – light-coloured long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and a hat
- Limit the time you spend outdoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active
- Use insect repellents that contain DEET or other approved ingredients.
- Ensure window and door screens are free of holes and fit tightly.
- Reduce mosquito populations around your home by eliminating stagnant water in pool covers, saucers under flower pots, pet bowls and wading pools. Regularly empty bird baths and clean eaves troughs.

For information on WN virus activity in your area, contact your provincial and/or local health authority.

For detailed information on West Nile virus in Canada, visit: Health Canada's West Nile Virus Web Site www.hc-sc.gc.ca