

Bucks County Department of Health Fact Sheet: West Nile Encephalitis

"Encephalitis" is an inflammation of the brain which may be caused by a bacteria or virus. West Nile encephalitis is an infection of the brain caused by West Nile virus. It is most commonly found in Africa, West Asia, and the Middle East.

People may be infected with West Nile virus through the bite of a mosquito. Mosquitoes often become infected with WNV by feeding on infected birds.

West Nile virus cannot be transmitted from one person to another person. There is also no evidence that birds can infect people. However, handling live or dead birds should be avoided unless gloves or other protection is used.

People who live in areas where virus activity has been found are at risk for getting West Nile encephalitis. People who are 50 years or older are at greater risk for severe disease.

Most infections are mild. Symptoms include fever, headache, body aches, and are often accompanied by a skin rash and swollen lymph glands. A more severe infection might cause headaches, high fevers, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis, and rarely, death.

There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus. In severe cases, intensive general supportive therapy is necessary. Examples of this would include hospitalization with intravenous fluids, breathing support if needed, and prevention of secondary infections.

There is no vaccine against West Nile encephalitis.

The incubation period (the length of time from infection until the first symptoms appear) is from 5 to 15 days in human beings.

If a person thinks he or she has West Nile encephalitis, they should seek medical attention immediately.

REDUCE YOUR RISK OF INFECTION!!

- **Stay indoors at dawn, dusk and in the early evening.**
- **Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants outdoors.**
- **Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin.**
Effective repellents contain 20% to 30% DEET (N, N-diethyl-metatoluamide). Avoid concentrations of DEET greater than 30% as they may cause side effects, especially in children.
- **Do not apply repellent to the hands of children who may put them in their eyes or mouth.**
- **Do not apply repellent at all to children who are less than three years old.**
- **Spray clothing with repellent.**
- **Whenever repellents or insecticides are used, follow the manufacturer's directions for use.**