

West Nile Virus Symptoms

Public Health - Factsheet

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a virus you can get from the bite of an infected mosquito. In Manitoba, the main carrier of the virus is the *Culex tarsalis* mosquito.

Who is at risk and when is risk the greatest?

In southern Manitoba, anyone can be exposed to West Nile Virus from June to September. The highest risk period occurs when the infected mosquito populations are greatest, typically from mid-July through the end of August.

Symptoms

Only one out of five people who are infected with WNV will develop symptoms, and the extent and severity of symptoms vary widely from person to person. The symptoms of WNV infection begin approximately three to 14 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

WNV Non-neurological Syndrome

Most people who develop symptoms will experience varying degrees of an illness known as WNV non-neurological syndrome. The symptoms of West Nile Virus non-neurological syndrome can include some or all of the following:

- fever
- headache
- muscle weakness
- muscle or joint aches
- fatigue
- mild rash
- sensitivity to light

Recovery from symptoms of WNV non-neurological syndrome may occur in about a week following onset of symptoms, but there can also be lasting health effects, including muscle weakness, memory problems and fatigue, which can last for months.

West Nile Virus Neurological Syndrome

Less frequently (in less than one per cent of WNV cases), the virus can cause more severe illness known as West Nile Virus neurological syndrome, which may result in hospitalization. Older adults or people with weakened immune systems (e.g., those living with HIV or cancer, or transplant patients receiving immunosuppressive drugs) are at greater risk of severe illness. **However, severe illness has occurred in all age groups.** The fatality rate for WNV neurological syndrome cases is about 10 per cent.

The symptoms of WNV neurological syndrome can include, in addition to those symptoms listed under West Nile non-neurological syndrome, some or all of the following:

- severe headache
- high fever
- stiff neck
- meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain)
- encephalitis (inflammation of the brain)
- paralysis
- coma

Treatment

There is no vaccine, cure or specific treatment for West Nile Virus. In more severe cases of WNV neurological syndrome, medical treatment consists of supportive care only, and may include:

- hospitalization
- intravenous (IV) fluids
- airway management
- respiratory support
- prevention of secondary infections, including pneumonia and urinary tract infections
- good nursing care

Because recovery from symptoms of WNV neurological syndrome may take up to a year or more, recovered individuals may require physical or occupational therapy or other support services.

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Most people will make a full recovery from West Nile Virus without any treatment. However, those with more severe illness may experience chronic or long-term conditions that may include:

- fatigue
- headache
- muscle pain or weakness
- gait or movement disorders
- light headedness
- confusion
- loss of concentration
- depression

Some people have not been able to return to work as quickly as expected. One study reported that 41 per cent to 55 per cent of individuals who were infected with WNV had not recovered physically, functionally or cognitively years after initial onset of illness.

If you or someone you know develops any of these severe WNV symptoms such as a severe headache, high fever, mental confusion, muscle weakness, coma or paralysis, see your health care provider immediately.

For more information about West Nile Virus, contact your health care provider or call Health Links-Info Santé at **204-788-8200** (Winnipeg) or toll free at **1-888-315-9257**.

Prevention is the first line of defense against West Nile Virus.

Find out more at www.gov.mb.ca/health/wnv/