

# West Nile Virus

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## Cause of Illness

West Nile virus is a disease that can be transmitted to humans from mosquitoes.

While it has been common in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East for decades, it first appeared in the U.S. in 1999 in New York. It has since traveled westward across the country and is now in Colorado.

Boulder County experienced significant impact from the virus during the 2003 season.

## Symptoms

- Fever
- Extreme fatigue
- Head & body aches
- Skin rashes
- Swollen lymph glands

### Severe Symptoms:

- Meningitis
- Encephalitis
- Vision loss
- Paralysis
- Coma
- Tremors
- Convulsions
- Death

One out of five people infected with WNV will suffer a debilitating illness that will often last longer than one week, and in some cases, more than three months.

## Transmission

The virus is carried long distances by infected birds and then spread locally by mosquitoes that bite these birds. The mosquitoes can then pass the virus to humans and animals, primarily birds and horses.

West Nile virus occurs during the summer months, generally from May to the first hard freeze in October. During these months, as the weather becomes warmer, mosquitoes are most active and switch from feeding on nectar to blood.

## Incubation Period

People will typically develop symptoms between 3 and 14 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

## Prevention and Control

Remember the four D's:

**DEET:** Use insect repellent that contains at least 10% DEET, or a DEET alternative.

**Dress:** Dress in long sleeves and long pants. If outside during evening, nighttime, and dawn hours when mosquitoes are most active and likely to bite, children and adults should wear protective clothing such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks.

**Dusk and Dawn:** Reduce or eliminate outdoor activity between dusk and dawn.

**Drain:** Ensure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace all screens in your home that have tears or holes.

## Treatment

Treatment for any communicable disease should always be done in consultation with your health care provider.

The only treatment available for West Nile Virus (WNV) is prevention.

## Resources

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Click on "Diseases and Conditions" and select the disease of interest.