

# West Nile virus

---

## What is West Nile virus?

West Nile virus is a flavivirus originally found in Africa, West Asia, and the Middle East. It first appeared in the U.S. on the east coast in 1999 and has since traveled westward across the U.S. The virus is now established as a seasonal epidemic in North America. The virus can infect humans, birds, mosquitoes, horses and some other mammals.

## How do I get West Nile?

Generally, humans become infected with the virus from the bites of mosquitoes. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Less common transmission routes are through blood transfusion, organ transplants, trans-placental (mother-to-unborn child), and breast milk.

## Symptoms

Symptoms generally appear 3 to 14 days after exposure. Most people who are infected with the virus will not have any illness or will have mild symptoms. About 20% of the people who become infected will develop symptoms of West Nile fever that include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Body aches
- Occasionally skin rashes and swollen lymph nodes

It is estimated that less than 1% of persons infected will develop severe illness. Persons over the age of 50 are more likely to have severe forms of the disease. The symptoms of severe infection, West Nile encephalitis (swelling of the brain) and/or meningitis (swelling of the brain's lining), include:

- Headache
- High fever
- Neck stiffness
- Stupor and disorientation
- Coma
- Tremors and disorientation
- Muscle weakness
- Paralysis

## Prevention

- Drain sources of standing water in ponds, ditches, clogged rain gutters, flowerpots, plant saucers, puddles, buckets, cans, wheelbarrows, tires, hubcaps, toys, garden equipment, pool covers, tarps, plastic sheeting, pipes, drains, boats, canoes and trash.
- Completely change water in birdbaths and wading pools weekly.
- Stock ornamental ponds and fountains with fish that eat mosquito larvae.
- Install or repair window and door screens to keep mosquitoes out.
- Avoid mosquitoes by staying indoors at dawn and dusk when they are most active.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants while outdoors.
- Apply insect repellent that contains DEET. Follow directions carefully.

**Visit the website at:**

[www.fightthebitecolorado.com](http://www.fightthebitecolorado.com)

## Treatment

There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus infection. Mild symptoms usually pass on their own. In more severe cases, intensive supportive therapy is indicated, often involving hospitalization.

## For more information, contact:

- Colorado West Nile virus Hot Line: 1-877-462-2911
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – West Nile virus Info Lines (open 24 hours a day)  
English: 1-888-246-2675      Spanish: 1-888-246-2857      Hearing-impaired TDD: 1-866-874-2646



Eleven offices serving the residents of Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties  
Administration Office: 6162 S. Willow Drive, Suite 100 • Greenwood Village, Colorado 80111  
Telephone: 303-220-9200 • Fax: 303-220-9208 • Website: [www.tchd.org](http://www.tchd.org)