



## Facts about West Nile Encephalitis

*Operation Mosquito S.T.I.N.G. is a strategy County Executive Andy Spano put in place to address the West Nile encephalitis outbreak. It is designed to track and control mosquitoes at an early stage to prevent illness due to West Nile virus in residents of Westchester County.*

### What is West Nile encephalitis?

West Nile Encephalitis is a mosquito borne viral illness transmitted through the bite of a mosquito, which may become infected with the virus by feeding on an infected bird. West Nile encephalitis is a viral infection of the brain and can cause serious illness or even be fatal to people over 50. West Nile virus is not transmitted from person to person or from birds to people.

### How is West Nile virus spread?

Through the bite of a mosquito infected with the virus. Infected mosquitoes may be active during daylight as well as evening hours.

### Who is at risk of contracting West Nile encephalitis?

The virus can infect anyone, but people over 50 are most susceptible to serious complications from the virus. 89% of known new cases in 2000 occurred in people over the age of 50.

### What are the symptoms of West Nile encephalitis?

Symptoms of infection with West Nile virus generally occur five to 15 days following the bite of an infected mosquito. Most people who are infected have no symptoms or may experience a fever and headache before fully recovering. More severe infections result in West Nile encephalitis with high fever, headache, confusion, muscle aches and weakness, seizures, or paralysis. At its most serious, the infection can result in coma, permanent neurological damage, and death.

### What can you do to reduce your risk of mosquito bites?

- Wear long sleeved shirts, long pants and socks when outdoors and use mosquito repellent on exposed skin.
- Use insect repellent with no more than 30% DEET, but use it sparingly and with care. Products which do not contain DEET may be less effective. (Products containing 10% or less DEET are recommended for children, but products containing DEET should not be used on infants. Carefully read and follow directions on the container and wash treated skin when mosquito exposure has ended.)
- Remove water from cans, jars, old tires, clogged roof gutters, yard decorations, or any other outdoor containers since mosquitoes lay eggs in standing water.
- Ensure that your home has tight-fitting screens over windows and doors to keep mosquitoes from entering apartments and homes.
- Residents should make arrangements to drain flooded basements and other areas where water accumulates. Drain or tightly cover swimming pools. This includes home pools as well as those found at country clubs and other sites, when not in use.

### Is there a vaccine or treatment for West Nile encephalitis?

There is no vaccine and treatment is directed at relieving symptoms. Antibiotics are not effective and there is no specific treatment available.

C: WNV Facts about encephalitis.qxd  
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