



FACTS ON WEST NILE VIRUS

- In 1999 West Nile Virus (WNV) was confirmed in New York. By Nov 2002 two-thirds of North America was showing cases of WNV. This is an abnormally rapid spread of disease. Because it is a new disease to this continent humans and animals have had no exposure therefore have no resistance.
- Members of the Corvid family have proven most highly susceptible species for acquiring West Nile.
- It is generally carried by mosquitoes as yet species unknown. It can also be transmitted by avian bodily fluids. Other blood sucking avian parasites may also be a factor. Because it is such a new disease transmission routes are unclear at this time. A wide range of bird and mammal species have had West Nile Virus confirmed, over 100 species.
- Neither refrigeration nor freezing can kill the virus and it can remain viable in dead birds for several days.
- Birds may carry the virus without exhibiting clinical signs. When clinical signs do exhibit, they include fever, lethargy, and neurological signs. These are not definitive however definite diagnosis is currently only available through post mortem testing. To date two North American researchers have contracted WNV through handling dead birds. (CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Review, 20 Dec. 2002).
- Horses and humans are the major species at risk because they can develop encephalitis. A vaccine is available for horses, however it has not proven effective with avian species. Compromised immune systems and people over the age of 50 are at increased risk.
- Treatment protocols have been attempted for affected crows and success rates have been extremely low. In most cases death resulted within 24 hours.

How to protect yourself from West Nile Virus

The best way to protect yourself from West Nile Virus is to minimize contact with mosquitoes.

1. Use insect repellents that contain DEET or other approved ingredients.
2. Mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk, so consider staying indoors at these times.
3. Wear protective clothing with long sleeves and pants and a hat. Mosquitoes are attracted to dark colours, so rather wear light colours.
4. Install screens on doors and windows and check for holes.
5. Mosquitoes lay eggs in standing water and it takes about four days for them to grow. Even a small amount of water, such as a saucer, can be a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Empty out saucers under flowerpots, change water in birdbaths, ponds and animal bowls, drain pool covers and remove any debris that may collect water.