

West Nile Virus: What you Need to Know

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This discussion contains important information that can help you recognize and prevent West Nile Virus. This information will provide our employees with an understanding of the West Nile Virus, about the diagnosis and on advising employees and the treatment they should receive if infected.

The West Nile virus (WNV) is a potentially serious illness. Experts believe WNV is established as a seasonal epidemic in North America that flares up in the summer and continues into the fall. West Nile virus (WNV) has emerged in recent years in temperate regions of Europe and North America, presenting a threat to public and animal health. The most serious manifestation of WNV infection is fatal encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) in humans and horses, as well as mortality in certain domestic and wild birds. WNV has also been a significant cause of human illness in the United States.

Discuss with your crew when and where the West Nile virus could be a problem at this particular job site:

After each question, give the crew time to suggest possible answers. Use the information following each question to add points that no one mentions.

1. What signs and symptoms might you notice if an employee has the West Nile virus?

WNV affects the central nervous system. Symptoms are the following:

- Serious Symptoms in a Few People. About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent.
- Milder Symptoms in Some People. Up to 20 percent of the people who become infected will display symptoms which can include fever, headache,

and body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. Symptoms can last for as short as a few days, though even healthy people have been sick for several weeks.

- No Symptoms in Most People. Approximately 80 percent of people (about 4 out of 5) who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all.

2. What if one of our employee's gets infected with the West Nile virus?

Most WNV infections are mild and often clinically unapparent. Approximately 20% of those infected develop a mild illness (West Nile Fever). Procedures for submitting diagnostic samples and reporting persons with suspected WNV infection vary among states and jurisdictions. The incubation period is thought to range from 3 to 14 days. Symptoms generally last 3 to 6 days. Reports from earlier outbreaks describe the mild form of WNV infection as an illness of sudden onset often accompanied by the following:

- Malaise;
- Anorexia;
- Nausea;
- Vomiting;
- Eye pain;
- Headache;
- Rash.

3. What can our employees do to prevent WNV?

The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites.

- When you are outdoors, use insect repellents containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide). Follow the directions on the package;
- Many mosquitoes are most active at dusk and dawn. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants at these times or consider staying indoors during these hours. Light-colored clothing can help you see mosquitoes that land on you;
- Make sure you have good screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out;
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets and barrels. Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird baths weekly. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out. Keep children's wading pools empty and on their sides when they aren't being used.

4. How Does the West Nile Virus Spread?

- Infected Mosquitoes. Most often, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes are WNV carriers that become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can then spread WNV to humans and other animals when they bite.
- Transfusions, Transplants, and Mother-to-Child. In a very small number of cases, WNV also has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and even during pregnancy from mother to baby.
- Not through touching. WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.

5. What is the risk of any of our employees getting sick from WNV?

- People over 50 at higher risk to get sick. People over the age of 50 are more likely to develop serious symptoms of WNV if they do get sick and should take special care to avoid mosquito bites.
- Being outside means you're at risk. The more time you're outdoors, the more time you could be bitten by an infected mosquito. Pay attention to avoiding mosquito bites if you spend a lot of time outside, either working or playing.
- Risk through medical procedures is very low. All donated blood is checked for WNV before being used. The risk of getting WNV through blood transfusions and organ transplants is very small, and should not prevent people who need surgery from having it. If you have concerns, talk to your doctor.

6. How is WNV Infection treated?

There is no specific treatment for WNV infection. In cases with milder symptoms, people experience symptoms such as fever and aches that pass on their own. In more severe cases, people usually need to go to the hospital where they can receive supportive treatment including intravenous fluids, help with breathing and nursing care.

OSHA Regulations

The safety measures we've talked about above should be included in your company's Safety and Health Program. At this time, there are no specific OSHA regulations on the West Nile Virus.

GENERAL SAFETY REVIEW

This is a time to review all safety concerns, not just today's topic. Keep your notes on this page before, during and after the safety meeting.

Are you aware of any safety hazards from any other crews? Point out any hazards other crews are creating that this crew should know about. Tell the crew what you intend to do about those hazards.

Do we have any other safety business? Discuss any past issues or problems. Report any progress of investigations and action taken.

Have there been any accidents, near misses or complaints? Discuss any accidents, near misses, and complaints that have happened since the last safety meeting. Also recognize the safety contributions made by members of the crew.

Please remember, we want to hear from you about any health and safety issues that come up. If we don't know about problems, we can't take action to fix them.

ENDING THE MEETING

Circulate Sign-Off Form.

Assign one or more crew member(s) to help with next safety meeting.

Refer action items for follow-up.

Do you have any Safety Recommendations?

Do you have any Job Specific Topics you would like us to discuss?
