



System Provider Health and Safety Alert **August 01, 2018**

West Nile Virus

In the past few weeks, the Austin Public Health Department has reported two (2) individuals infected with the West Nile Virus (WNV) in Travis County. Vector surveillance has indicated activity of the virus in mosquitoes within the city limits. While the activity is not to the levels seen since 2012 when the most cases of WNV were detected in Travis County, it is important to re-emphasize the continuing risk to possible exposure to this disease.

The intensity of West Nile virus activity in Texas fluctuates from year to year and depends on a variety of factors including the weather, the numbers of birds and mosquitoes that maintain and spread the virus, and human behavior. Most WNV infections occur from July through September. The season can last up until the first hard freeze of the year.

Humans can contract West Nile virus from a mosquito bite. Infected mosquitoes get the virus from feeding on infected birds and mammals. The virus can cause serious illness or death. There are two presentations of the disease.

WEST NILE NEUROINVASIVE DISEASE:

Symptoms include stiff neck, visual problems, body tremors, mental confusion, memory loss and seizures.

WEST NILE FEVER:

The milder form of the illness has symptoms which include fever, headache, muscle and bone aches, nausea and drowsiness.

People with the milder form of illness typically recover on their own, although symptoms may last for several weeks. Up to 80 percent of people infected with West Nile virus will have no symptoms and will recover on their own.

There are no medications to treat or vaccines to prevent West Nile virus infection. People over 50 years old and those with compromised immune systems are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill when they become infected with the virus. If people have symptoms that cause them concern, they should contact their healthcare provider.

The mosquito that is known to transmit WNV is active from dusk to dawn. **Prevention** should focus on both **controlling the mosquito population** and on **reducing the risk for bites**.

Providers should adhere to the **4 D's**:

- **Dress** - Wear long pants and long sleeved shirts when outdoors particularly at dawn and dusk.
- **DEET based repellent or equivalent** - Use an approved insect repellent every time you go outside and follow the instructions on the label. Approved repellents are those that contain DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- **Drain** - Regularly drain standing water, including water collects in empty cans or buckets. Mosquitoes breed in stagnant water.
- **Defer** - Outside activity from Dusk to Dawn.

The nature of our work activities can result in many providers participating in active emergency responses as well as physical and continuing education training during the hours that mosquitos are most active. Particular attention should be paid to those individuals who undertake physical training and thus have a tendency to dress less and should be provided access to an appropriate repellent.

Opportunities for Interaction with mosquitoes include:

- Outside activities
 - Physical Training
 - Vehicle Rescues
- Wildfire Mitigation
- Cave and Greenbelt Rescues

Agencies should make every effort to be proactive in educating and increasing awareness of providers to WNV and ensure they have access to the appropriate barriers to prevent infections.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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