West Nile virus (WNV) is a potentially serious illness. Most often, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can then spread WNV to humans and other animals when they bite. 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.

Experts believe WNV is established as a seasonal epidemic in North America that flares up in the summer and continues into the fall.

Symptoms of West Nile Virus

- **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. Serious illness can occur in people of any age, however people over the age of 50 and some immunocompromised persons (for example, transplant patients) are at the highest risk for getting severely ill when infected with WNV.

- **Milder Symptoms in Some People.** Up to 20 percent of the people who become infected have symptoms such as 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 become 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.

Typically symptoms develop between 3 and 14 days after a person is bitten by an infected mosquito.

Treatment for West Nile Virus

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, although even healthy people have become sick for several weeks. 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. No vaccine is available for humans.

What should I do if I think I have WNV?

Milder WNV illness improves on its own, and people do not necessarily need to seek medical attention for this infection though they may choose to do so. If you develop symptoms of severe WNV illness, such as unusually severe headaches or confusion, seek medical attention immediately. Severe WNV illness usually requires hospitalization. Pregnant women and nursing mothers are encouraged to talk to their doctor if they develop symptoms that could be WNV.

To view current WNV information and statistics for Dallas County please click [here](#).