



West Nile Virus: Information for New Mexico

Guide I-102

Bruce Jacobs
Extension Health Specialist

Cooperative Extension Service • College of Agriculture and Home Economics



This publication is scheduled to be updated and reissued 6/09.

WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS?

West Nile is a virus that can lead to serious illness for some people and animals. A virus is an extremely small organism that causes diseases in humans, animals, and plants.

HOW IS WEST NILE VIRUS SPREAD?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is spread to people and animals by bites of infected mosquitoes (the mosquito gets infected through feeding on infected birds and birds get infected by infected mosquitoes... this is a continuous cycle).

WNV is **not** transmitted from person-to-person (such as through casual contact).

A few cases of WNV transmission from blood transfusions, organ transplants, and from mother-to-child (during pregnancy or breastfeeding) have been reported.

WNV is **not** transmitted from animal-to-animal (such as horse-to-horse), animal-to-human or human-to-animal.

IS WEST NILE VIRUS FOUND IN NEW MEXICO?

Yes.

- Over 200 cases of WNV in humans have been reported in New Mexico from July 2003-May 2004.
- Over 500 cases of WNV in horses have been reported in New Mexico from August 2002-May 2004.
- Dead birds (Crows, Ravens, Magpies, Blue Jays, Scrub Jays, Steller Jays, Pinon Jays) in your geographic area *might* be a sign of WNV infection.

HOW SICK CAN **A PERSON** GET WHO'S INFECTED WITH WEST NILE VIRUS?

Although WNV usually does not cause serious illness in people, it *can* cause health problems and sometimes death.

For those who do get sick from WNV infection, people over 50 years of age are more likely to develop serious symptoms.

Among people infected with WNV:

- Most (about 8 out of 10) do not develop any symptoms.
- Some (about 2 out of 10) develop mild symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back.
 - Mild symptoms such as these usually last a few days.
- Very few people (less than 1 out of 100) will develop, serious symptoms such as high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis.
 - These symptoms typically last a few weeks, but WNV's effect on the nervous system (including the brain) can be permanent.

HOW SICK CAN **AN ANIMAL** GET WHO'S INFECTED WITH WEST NILE VIRUS?

Although cats, cattle, horses, dogs and sheep can be infected with WNV, only horses primarily get sick.

Among horses that become ill, an average of 3 out of 10 die or need to be euthanized.

Other livestock and poultry can get infected with WNV, but do not commonly get sick.

Although dogs or cats can become infected with WNV, clinical signs rarely appear.

PROTECTION AGAINST WEST NILE VIRUS

Minimize exposure to mosquitoes for both people and animals.

- Eliminate standing water, which is ripe for breeding mosquitoes (this includes places such as old tires, unused farm equipment, barrels, or other water receptacles).
- Keep watering troughs, bird baths, flower pots, etc., clean by changing the water once or twice per week.
- Install or repair window, door and patio screens around the home.

Additional protection for people:

- Use insect repellent containing DEET sparingly on exposed skin and on clothing when outdoors (always read product label for proper use).
- Wear shoes, socks, long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors.
- Limit time outside—or stay inside—during peak mosquito-biting hours (dawn and dusk).

Additional protection for animals:

- Horses
 - Vaccinate your horses with the Fort Dodge Animal Health West Nile Virus Vaccine approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (see your veterinarian about the initial vaccination and annual booster).
 - There is no treatment for WNV once a horse becomes infected.

- Pets
 - Keep pets indoors during peak mosquito biting hours (dawn and dusk).
 - Prevent pets from coming into contact with dead birds that might be infected with WNV.
 - Use only veterinarian-approved mosquito repellent on your pet (**do not** use products containing DEET on pets).
 - Consult your veterinarian for preventive precautions.

SOURCES

American Veterinary Medical Association
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
New Mexico Department of Health
United States Department of Agriculture

Special thanks to the members of the Agricultural Communications pre-press unit for their assistance with this publication.