

West Nile virus (WNV)

Personal Protection

What is WNV?

WNV is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause illness, including in rare cases, encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).

WNV can be spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become carriers of the virus when they feed on infected birds. Human infections from the virus are rare and those affected usually experience only mild symptoms such as fever or headaches. The illness can be serious and inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) can occur in a small number of cases.

Who is at risk?

In previous years WNV has been confirmed in Simcoe Muskoka. Anyone who lives in an area where there are mosquitoes infected with WNV may be at risk of acquiring this illness. WNV is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. This makes it important that you and your family take precautions to reduce the chances of being bitten by a mosquito.

What are the symptoms of WNV?

Flu-like symptoms begin in humans, about 3 to 14 days after a bite from an infected mosquito. Although most people will not become sick if bitten by an infected mosquito, WNV can cause severe illness in some people. Those at greatest risk of severe illness are people over the age of 50 and people with chronic diseases or weakened immune systems.

If you have any of the following symptoms: fever, muscle weakness, stiff neck, confusion, severe headache, or sudden sensitivity to light, consult a doctor. These may be early symptoms of WNV illness or of other illnesses that would require medical attention.

What can I do to protect myself?

Try to stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active (dusk to dawn). When you do go outside, wear light-coloured, long-sleeved shirts, long pants and use a repellent. When using insect repellent be sure to follow the manufacturer's recommendations.

What should I consider when purchasing insect repellent?

When choosing a repellent, consider a product that meets your needs, and only use personal repellents that are registered in Canada. Never use a product labelled as an *insecticide* on your body. Make sure you:

- read repellent label carefully before using
- apply the repellent sparingly on any exposed skin (do not apply underneath clothes), avoiding your eyes; if you do get repellent in your eyes, rinse with water immediately

- spray in well ventilated areas
- are not sensitive to a product, by applying repellent to a small area on your arm and waiting 24 hours
- If you suspect you or your child may be having a reaction to the repellent, stop using the product immediately, wash the treated area, and seek medical attention.

Are there alternatives to a DEET repellent?

P-menthane 3,8-diol and soybean oil are active ingredients that can protect people against mosquito bites. Products containing P-menthane 3,8-diol can provide up to two hours of protection against mosquitoes but cannot be used on children under three years of age. Products containing soybean oil can provide between one to 3.5 hours of protection against mosquitoes, depending on the product. Be sure to read the labels before applying any repellent.

A re-evaluation of citronella and lavender has raised some uncertainties of their effectiveness against mosquitoes. The PMRA (Pest Management Regulatory Agency) is proposing citronella-based and lavender oil insect repellents be phased out.

For more information on using personal insect repellents see Health Canada's "[Choosing a Personal Insect Repellent](#)".

Where can I get more information?

The health unit is encouraging people to reduce mosquito-breeding sites and to take personal precautions as first steps to protect themselves against WNV. For more information call *Your Health Connection* at 705-721-7520 (1-877-721-7520), or visit the following websites:

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

www.simcoemuskokahealth.org

Health Canada

www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

www.healthyontario.com