

Important Information on the West Nile virus

Fighting the West Nile virus.

Ontario's 7 point action plan.

The West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne virus that poses a health risk. Most infected people show mild symptoms but for a rare few it is serious, possibly fatal. It is not an airborne virus like the Flu or a cold. It is transmitted through the blood.

Following the Government's commitment in its 2003 Budget to invest \$100 million over five years to help stop the spread of West Nile virus, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is launching an aggressive seven-point action plan.

Here are some of the details of this seven-point action plan.

1. New lab capabilities: Faster results for faster treatments.

Timely reporting of test results is essential for patient treatment and data collection. Therefore, we are adding new staff and equipment to provide new provincial testing capabilities, reducing the time it takes to get West Nile virus test results.

2. Tracking the virus: Responding faster to protect public health.

Effective May 1, 2003, West Nile virus will be both a reportable disease and a communicable disease under the Health Protection and Promotion Act reporting to the local medical officers of health. This means that there is a formal and required reporting mechanism for cases of the disease. This information will give your local medical officer better information to take whatever actions are needed to protect public health.

Additionally, we will be tracking the migration of the virus through dead crows and ravens, mosquito breeding areas for larvae pools, as well as horses.

3. Public Education: Informing you of the best ways to protect yourself and your family.

Educating the public on how to protect themselves from mosquito bites, reducing mosquito breeding grounds around the home and informing healthcare providers of new issues regarding the transmission of West Nile virus (organ transplants or blood donations) is essential for all of us. We will ensure that you are kept informed of developments with West Nile virus and advised on how to protect yourself and your family.

4. Mosquito Control: Controlling bugs means less chance of being bitten.

Funding is being made available to every Public Health Unit for larviciding (pesticidal products called larvicides are placed in stagnant water where mosquitoes prefer to lay their eggs) and, as a last resort, adulticiding (or what is commonly referred to as pesticidal spray). Public health units will make the decision on what control activities will be carried out, with the ministry cost-sharing the costs of these activities.

5. Early Warning: Helping you be prepared.

A pilot project is being implemented for an early warning system to better track the outbreak of the virus and to be able to make more timely decisions on its management.

6. Community Exposure Study: Letting you know how fast and far West Nile virus is traveling.

Many people bitten by infected mosquitoes don't show any signs of serious illness. So in Halton region, we're gathering data on how many people were infected in 2002. This information will help us determine how widespread the disease has become.

7. Research: Keeping abreast of the latest information.

We will continue consultations with community groups and with national and international professional organizations to maintain an ongoing flow of information with physicians and patients with West Nile virus symptoms. This will also enable us to have the latest information on mosquito control techniques, disease surveillance methods and results, and successful public education approaches.

Mosquito season will soon be here. We will be keeping you informed on West Nile virus. For more information, visit our web site or call our InfoLine.

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