

West Nile virus

PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

What is West Nile virus?

Some mosquitoes carry West Nile virus and their bites may lead to West Nile virus infection. Mosquitoes become infected when they bite an infected bird.

Who is at risk for West Nile virus?

Everyone who is active and outside during the summer months should take precautions to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. People who have chronic illnesses and the elderly should be especially careful.

What are the symptoms?

The risk of becoming seriously ill is low. In fact, for the very few who are bitten by an infected mosquito, most do not even know it. While the majority of people who become infected will experience no symptoms or have very mild illness, for some the symptoms will be pronounced. West Nile virus illness consists of fever, muscle weakness, stiff neck, confusion, severe headache, and a sudden sensitivity to light. For a very rare few, the virus causes serious neurological illness.

WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Prevention and protection are the best ways to protect yourself and your family from West Nile virus. There are simple and common sense precautions that should be taken:

Clean up

The best way to keep mosquitoes away is to clean up areas of stagnant water where they like to breed. Look around your house and property and get rid of places that are "mosquito friendly." Eliminate stagnant water which may gather in pool covers, flower pots, children's pools, old tires and birdbaths.

Cover up

Mosquitoes are most active between dusk and dawn. If you need to be outside at this time, cover up and consider using insect repellent for extra protection. Make sure screens on your home are tight-fitting and in good repair.

WHAT YORK REGION IS DOING...

The York Region West Nile virus control plan for 2005 is multi-faceted and includes extensive public education, mosquito control activities (including larviciding), and mosquito, bird and human surveillance.

What is larviciding?

Larviciding is a low risk and effective measure for the control of West Nile virus when used according to label instructions. The slow-release pellet formulation interferes with the mosquito life cycle, preventing the mosquito larva from reaching maturity. It is not sprayed. Larvicide will be applied into the stagnant water of catch basins in four phases, from June through September.

Will York Region apply larvicide on private property?

If you are concerned about catch basins on your property, place a mesh screen over the catch basin to prevent mosquitoes from entering and exiting. A limited number of rear yard catch basins located on private property will be treated with larvicide on a case-by-case basis.

The Town of Markham is providing mesh screens to Markham residents with rear yard catch basins. Call Health Connection for details.

Why are dead birds being collected?

Like humans, West Nile virus is transmitted to the bird population by infected mosquitoes. Crows, blue jays and other raptorial species are known to be most susceptible to the disease and act as early warning signs for the presence of the virus in a particular area.

Report dead crows and blue jays

Suitable specimens may be collected and submitted to the Canadian Co-operative Wildlife Health Centre in Guelph for testing. All crows and blue jays that are reported will help to map out possible West Nile virus activity in York Region.

Dead crows and blue jays are to be reported to York Region Health Services through the Health Connection information line at 1-800-361-5653.

- **Suitable specimens** - A suitable specimen must be a crow or blue jay that has died less than 12 hours prior to collection. These birds may be collected by York Region Health Services and sent for testing.
- **Unsuitable specimens** - Most dead birds will not be suitable for testing, but knowing what species they are and where they died is important information. Do not handle birds with bare hands or dispose of dead birds through the municipal garbage systems. If you choose to handle a dead bird, wear rubber gloves, double bag the bird and contact Health Connection for pick-up.
- **Dead bird pick-up service is available** - Please contact Health Connection for pickup of dead birds of any species. Dead birds will be picked up within 24 hours where possible.

For more information about West Nile virus contact York Region Health Services Health Connection

1-800-361-5653

www.york.ca

York Region

York Region Health Services does not recommend the use of bat boxes as an effective method for mosquito control since during past summer seasons several bats have tested positive for rabies in York Region.