

DC 37 Safety and Health Fact Sheet

WEST NILE VIRUS



West Nile virus can cause flu-like symptoms and, in rare cases, encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain.



Transmission

The virus is transmitted by the bite of a mosquito that is infected with West Nile virus. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. During later mosquito blood feedings, the virus is transmitted to an animal or human, where it multiplies and may cause illness. The West Nile virus is **NOT** transmitted person-to-person, animal-to-person or bird-to-person. Mosquitoes breed in stagnant water, puddles and swampy areas.

Signs and Symptoms

Many people infected with West Nile virus never develop any signs or symptoms. Others, particularly the elderly, can develop mild symptoms. It usually takes five to 15 days for symptoms to appear. Mild symptoms include fever, headache and body aches, and are accompanied by skin rashes and swollen lymph glands. More severe infections may be marked by headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis and, rarely, death.

Treatment

There is no vaccine against West Nile virus. If you think you have West Nile virus, you should see your doctor as soon as possible.

Prevention

Outdoor workers, and those involved in the mosquito control activities, should:

- Wear long sleeves and long pants, preferably of light-colored, breathable fabric, when working in high-risk areas.
- Receive training on the proper use of insecticides, pesticides and larvicides used for mosquito control. Be informed about the hazards associated with over-exposure to such products.
- Receive training on proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) listed on the labels and material safety data sheets (MSDS) of mosquito control products. The agency must provide the appropriate PPE free of charge.
- Follow all instructions given on the pesticide, insecticide and larvicide labels and MSDS. These chemicals are closely regulated by the United States Environmental Protection Agency.
- Use the insect repellent provided by the employer. Instructions on the use of the repellent should be provided, and an MSDS and labels should be readily available.

Insect Repellent

The insect repellent provided by your employer should:

- Contain 20%–30% DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide).*

- Be applied sparingly to exposed skin and clothes.

The following precautions should be followed when applying repellents:

- Do not apply over cuts, wounds or irritated skin.
- Use just enough repellent to cover exposed skin and/or clothes.
- Do not use under clothing.
- Avoid overapplication of this product.
- After returning indoors, wash all treated skin with soap and water.
- Wash treated clothing before wearing it again.
- Do not spray in enclosed areas.
- To apply to face, spray on hands first and then rub on face. Do not spray directly onto face.
- DEET is effective for approximately 4 hours. If outside for more than 4 hours, re-apply.

If you have any questions about the insecticides, larvicides, pesticides, repellents and personal protective equipment your employer is using, please call your union representative or division.

**Do not use DEET if you are pregnant. Also, in rare cases, lotions containing DEET may cause skin reactions. If you experience any type of skin irritation, notify your supervisor and seek medical attention. Call your union representative for assistance for appropriate accommodation.*

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