

# HEALTH ALERT

*Office of Developmental Programs*

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*Office of the Medical Director*

## **WEST NILE VIRUS**

It is summer again and there have been numerous reports across both the state and the country of birds carrying the West Nile virus. The incidence of West Nile virus seems to be increased this year based on sampling of birds for the virus. With this there will continue to be reports of human illness and death caused by West Nile virus. Human illness from this virus is rare even in areas where the virus has been found. Significant illness and even death are even rarer and often occur in those who are at higher risk such as those over 50 years of age. Most human West Nile virus infections occur in August and September.

Symptoms of West Nile virus are flu-like in nature and usually mild although can be more severe.

West Nile virus is transmitted by mosquito bites from an insect carrying the virus. Prevention of mosquito bites is the best way to prevent West Nile virus. Here are some strategies to prevent mosquito bites.

1. Use insect repellent when you are outside. DEET has been shown to be an effective insect repellent. Always follow the product instructions and avoid using insect repellent on areas that might come in contact with mucous membranes such as the mouth or hands.
2. Wear clothing with long-sleeves, long pants, and high socks to protect against bites.
3. Spray clothing with insect repellent.
4. Stay indoors during peak mosquito hours from dusk to dawn (evening to early morning).
5. Avoid areas where mosquitoes are known to be such as bodies of standing water such as bird baths or trash cans.
6. Eliminate standing water where possible.

For more information about West Nile virus access the PA Department of Health webpage at [www.westnile.state.pa.us](http://www.westnile.state.pa.us) or the CDC West Nile virus page <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm> or contact your local Department of Health.