

Fight the Bite – Protect Yourself from West Nile Virus

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Recent rains and warm weather create a prime breeding environment for mosquitoes. With more mosquitoes comes an increased risk for West Nile virus. But by taking some simple precautions, you can protect yourself from being bitten and being infected with West Nile virus.

West Nile virus is carried by birds, and is transmitted when a mosquito bites an infected bird and then bites a person, animal or another bird. Most people who are infected will not even get sick. A few may have mild symptoms like a fever, headache or body aches. A very small number (less than 1%) of people may become very ill and may even die. Most of those serious illnesses occur in people over 50 years old.

Even though your chance of becoming sick is very low, it is still important to protect yourself and our community from mosquitoes.

A mosquito can breed in as little as one teaspoonful of water. Look around your yard for places where a tiny amount of water can soon become a haven for breeding mosquitoes. Be sure to drain water out of –

- piles of leaves
- empty flower pots
- small pieces of trash
- an unused bird bath
- an old tire
- the lid to your child's sandbox
- the lid to your trash can
- a pet's water dish

Pick up trash in your yard. Clean up leaves and brush piles. Keep your grass mowed short. Trim trees to allow more sunlight into your yard. Check with your local health department or public works department to find out if anyone in your area is sponsoring a clean-up day to collect old tires, cans and yard debris.

Eliminate mosquito breeding habitats by getting rid of standing water in your yard.

- Dispose of old tires, cans, wading pools or any other items that collect water.
- Make sure your roof gutters are draining properly.
- Change the water in birdbaths and pet dishes daily.
- Dispose of piles of brush or leaves.
- Use Mosquito Dunks®, according to the product label, in standing water like ponds.

You can also take steps to protect yourself against mosquito bites.

- Stay indoors at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear long sleeved shirts, socks and long pants when you must be outdoors.
- Use an approved insect repellent, and follow the instructions on the product label.
- Talk to your physician or health care provider before applying insect repellants to young children.
- Make sure your window screens fit tightly and are free from holes.

Remember, the best way to keep from getting West Nile virus is to get rid of mosquito breeding grounds and avoid getting bitten. For more information, call the Springfield-Greene County Health Department at (417) 864-1658.