

# From The Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness

## WEST NILE VIRUS INFORMATION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

### **Q: What is the West Nile Virus?**

**A:** West Nile virus, previously found only in other parts of the world such as Africa, Eastern Europe, and Western Asia, appeared in the United States in 1999, and in Georgia in 2001. It is carried by certain mosquitoes that infect birds, animals, and people.

### **Q: How is the West Nile Virus spread to humans?**

**A:** Mosquitoes take blood from infected birds and then bite people.

### **Q: Are those with weakened immune systems more at risk for becoming ill with West Nile Virus?**

**A:** Yes, people over the age of 50 have the highest risk of developing severe illness because their bodies have a harder time fighting off disease. People with compromised or weakened immune systems are also at a higher risk. However, anyone can get the virus..

### **Q: What are the symptoms?**

**A:** Most people have no symptoms or experience mild flu-like symptoms. In rare cases, the virus may cause encephalitis (swelling of the brain). However, see a doctor immediately if you develop symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, severe headaches, stiff neck, or if your eyes become sensitive to light.

Patients with mild symptoms should recover completely, and do not require any specific medication nor laboratory testing.

### **Q: How long does it take to get sick if bitten by an infected mosquito?**

**A:** Illness will occur within 5 to 15 days.

### **Q: What should one do if they think they may have the West Nile Encephalitis?**

**A:** Seek medical care as soon as possible.

### **Q: If a mosquito has bitten me, should I be tested for West Nile Virus?**

**A:** No. Illnesses related to mosquito bites are rare. Most mosquitoes are not infected. Patients with mild symptoms should recover completely.

**Q: How is West Nile Encephalitis treated?**

**A:** There is no specific treatment or therapy for West Nile Encephalitis. However, the symptoms and complications can be treated. See your Doctor for support.

**Q: Is there a vaccine against the West Nile Virus?**

**A:** No. A vaccine for West Nile Virus does not exist.

**Q: If I live in an area where birds or mosquitoes with the West Nile Virus have been reported, am I likely to get sick if I am bitten?**

**A:** No. Very few mosquitoes--less than 1%--are infected. The chances are rare that any one mosquito bite will be from an infected mosquito.

**Q: What can I do to reduce the risk of becoming infected?**

**A:** Wear protective clothing such as long pants, long sleeved-shirts, and socks. Use insect repellent containing 10% or less DEET (N, N-diethyl-methyl-meta-toluamide) for children older than 5 years of age and no more than 30% DEET for adults. Do not use DEET on infants nor pregnant women. For children under 5 years olds or pregnant women, DEET-free mosquito repellents are available.

***NOTE: USE DEET ACCORDING TO MANUFACTURER'S INSTRUCTIONS***

**Q: What can I do at home to protect myself from exposure to mosquitoes?**

**A:** Protect yourself from mosquito bites. Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water. Weeds, tall grass, and bushes provide an outdoor home for breeding. Eliminate standing, stagnant water that can promote breeding.

**ADDITIONAL TIPS:**

- Make sure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace all screens in your home that have tears or holes.
- Remove all discarded tires from your property or drain and cover them to prevent mosquito breeding.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly. Clean clogged gutters.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor spas, saunas, and hot tubs. If not in use, keep them empty and covered.
- Drain improperly installed and sagging pool covers.

- Change the water in birdbaths at least once every 4 days.
- Turn over plastic wading pools, wagons, and other child toys.
- Store wheelbarrows up side down when not in use.
- Eliminate any standing water that collects on your property.
- Remind friends and neighbors to eliminate breeding sites on their properties.

**For more information about the West Nile Virus call:**

**The Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness**

Mosquito Information Hotline (404) 730-5296

The Epidemiology Hotline (404) 224-0478

**For questions regarding dead birds call:**

North Fulton District (770) 640-3053, Extension 0

**Jerry Kerce (404) 730 1318**

Central District - Atlanta (404)730-1301

South Fulton District (404)730-1335

Fulton County Health Department Searchable Web Site:

<http://www.co.fulton.ga.us/Health/>