



August 3, 2012

## HEALTH AND SAFETY BULLETIN

### West Nile Virus

This Bulletin has been prepared for faculty and staff of Queen's University and includes information concerning both health and workplace issues related to the West Nile Virus.

Queen's University is in frequent contact with the local Public Health authorities and will post regular updates on the West Nile Virus on the Environmental Health & Safety Web Site [www.safety.queensu.ca](http://www.safety.queensu.ca)

Useful information is also available at the following websites:

Province of Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care:

[http://health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/publichealth/wnv/default.aspx/wnv\\_resources.html](http://health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/publichealth/wnv/default.aspx/wnv_resources.html)

Health Canada: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/dc-ma/wnv-vno-eng.php>

World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs354/en/>

#### What is the West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne virus. It was first reported in 1937 in the West Nile Region of Uganda. Mosquitoes transmit the virus after becoming infected by feeding on the blood of birds which carry the virus. In Canada, the virus was first confirmed in birds in Ontario in 2001 and the first human case of West Nile Virus was confirmed in Ontario in September 2002.

The West Nile Virus is not spread Person-to-Person and it does not appear it is spread from birds to humans.

#### What are the Symptoms of West Nile Virus?

For most Canadians, the risk of illness from West Nile virus is low, and the risk of serious health effects is even lower. Nevertheless, it is important to know the symptoms of illness related to infection and how to minimize your risk, especially if virus activity is reported in an area near you.

Many infected people have no symptoms and do not get sick or have only mild symptoms such as fever, headache and body aches. Some people may also develop a mild rash, or swollen lymph glands. When infection does cause illness, symptoms will usually appear within two to 15 days. The extent and severity of symptoms vary widely from person to person.

If you have any of these symptoms (rapid onset of severe headache, muscle weakness, high fever, stiff neck, sudden sensitivity to light, confusion, loss of consciousness, extreme swelling or infection at the site of the mosquito bite) seek medical help. These may be early signs of the West Nile Virus or of many other illnesses.



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### Minimize You Risk

To protect yourself, you should avoid being bitten by mosquitoes by minimizing your exposure through the following:

- When going outdoors, use insect repellents that contain DEET or other approved ingredients. For specific tips on using insect repellents, and the recommended DEET concentrations go to [http://health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/publichealth/wnv/default.aspx/wnv\\_resources.html](http://health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/publichealth/wnv/default.aspx/wnv_resources.html)
- Try to avoid spending time outdoors at dawn and at dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear protective clothing such long-sleeved shirts, long pants and a hat. Light coloured clothing is best because mosquitoes tend to be more attracted to dark colours.

### Work Environment

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, employers and employees are responsible for ensuring that their workplaces are safe. **If an employee feels that the circumstances at work are unsafe, these concerns should be brought to the attention of the supervisor or Department Head or the unit's Joint Health and Safety Committee.** Generally, solutions are reached through discussion and consultation among these individuals and the Department of Environmental Health and Safety. If a resolution is not achieved through these discussions, an employee has the right to refuse unsafe work and the supervisor would be expected to initiate the work refusal process under the Act.

Employers and Supervisors are also responsible for informing employees of actual or potential hazards. In the case of West Nile Virus, it is recommended the Supervisors provide this information to employees, as well as discussing and implementing the recommended control measures when conducting work or research activities outdoors.

### Contact Information:

- Environmental Health & Safety 32999
- Emergency Report Centre 36111