

**What Older  
Pennsylvanians  
Should Know  
About**



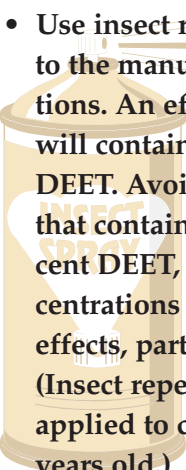
**West  
Nile  
Virus**

*Compliments of*  
**Your State Senator**

## If the virus is found in my area, how can I protect myself?

If the virus is found in your area, there are easy ways you can protect yourself from getting bitten by a mosquito.

Tear off this sheet and put it on your refrigerator for easy reference!

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- Use insect repellent according to the manufacturer's instructions. An effective repellent will contain 20-30 percent DEET. Avoid using products that contain more than 30 percent DEET, because in high concentrations it may cause side effects, particularly in children; (Insect repellents should not be applied to children under 3 years old.)
  - Spray clothing with repellents;
  - When possible, reduce your outdoor exposure, especially at dawn, dusk and in the early evening during peak mosquito periods (usually April through October); and
  - Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors.

**T**his brochure will provide you with a brief background about the West Nile Virus; how you can prevent mosquito breeding; and steps you can take to protect yourself if the virus is found in your area.

## What is the West Nile virus?

The West Nile virus, previously only found in Africa, Eastern Europe and West Asia, appeared in Pennsylvania in 2000. It is carried by a certain kind of mosquito that infects birds, animals and people.

This virus can cause encephalitis, which is an infection of the brain.

West Nile virus cases occur primarily in the late summer or early fall, although the peak season is usually April-October.

The virus is spread primarily by the Northern house mosquito after it feeds on infected birds and then bites people or other animals. It is not spread by person-to-person contact. There is no evidence that people can get the disease by handling infected animals.

Since 2000, Pennsylvania's State budget has included funding to prevent and mitigate the potential public-health effects of West Nile on the citizens of the Commonwealth. The funds provide necessary staffing and an improved epidemiological infrastructure to monitor and control the virus.

## Who is most at risk?

People over 50 years of age have the highest risk of developing severe illness because as we age, our bodies have a harder time fighting off disease. People with compromised immune systems are also at risk. However, anyone can get the virus.

## What are the symptoms?

People with mild infections may experience fever, headache, body aches, skin rash and swollen lymph glands. People with more severe infections may experience high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, occasional convulsions and paralysis. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your doctor.

## Is there treatment?

There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus infection. While most people fully recover from the virus, in some severe cases hospitalization may be needed.

## How can I prevent mosquitoes from breeding?



- Any time is a good time to eliminate areas where mosquitoes breed. Tear off this sheet and put it on your refrigerator for easy reference!
- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or other water-holding containers on your property;
- Pay special attention to discarded tires on your property;
- Drill holes in the bottom of recycling containers that are left outdoors;
- Clean clogged roof gutters;
- Turn over plastic wading pools when not in use;
- Aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish;
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools that are not being used; and
- Use landscaping to eliminate standing water on your property.



*The state departments of Health; Environmental Protection; Aging; Agriculture; Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Fish and Boat and Game Commissions have created a comprehensive, statewide plan to try to prevent a virus outbreak in Pennsylvania.*

For more information visit  
**[www.westnile.state.pa.us](http://www.westnile.state.pa.us)**  
or call  
**1-877-PA-HEALTH**

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## **Your State Senator**

