



Blue Sky Pediatrics Asheville

Making every Child's day brighter by.....
explaining West Nile Virus

Newsletter

WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS AND HOW IS IT SPREAD?

West Nile Virus is caused by a bite from an infected mosquito that is already carrying the virus. It's important to remember that not all mosquitoes are infected and that not everyone that gets bitten by an infected mosquito will get the virus. In some parts of the Country, the risk of being bitten by an infected mosquito is greatest from July to early September, but mosquito bites can be a risk all year long. Currently in the state of North Carolina, this season has shown two deaths and five active cases in West Nile Virus. The greatest risk months for the state of North Carolina are August and September. West Nile Virus is not spread from person to person. That means that your child can't catch it from a friend that they played with the day before. Also remember that although pets can get the virus, they can't spread it to people. The only way to get it is from the bite of an infected mosquito. If you or your child find a dead bird, don't handle the body with your bare hands. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Contact your local health department for instructions on reporting and disposing of the dead bird.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS AND HOW IS IT TREATED?

Most of the time the symptoms of West Nile Virus are similar to the flu and can include fever, headache, neck and back stiffness, muscle ache, tiredness, joint pain, swollen glands and rash. Obviously, having one or more of these symptoms does not mean that you have the virus as these are common symptoms for many different types of illness. Kids with a normal immune system usually just get a mild flu-like illness and may not feel bad at all. It is rare for them to become very sick from West Nile Virus. People typically will develop symptoms between 3-14 days after they are bitten by the infected mosquito. Mild West Nile Virus illness improves on its own and you do not necessarily need to seek medical attention for this infection. If you develop symptoms of severe illness such as unusually severe headaches, confusion, neck stiffness, stupor, tremors, numbness or visual changes, please seek medical attention immediately by calling our office at 828-687-8709 or going to your nearest hospital emergency room. Although severe West Nile Virus illness might require hospitalization to treat the symptoms, there is no specific treatment. Antibiotics do not help fight the infection. There is also no vaccine to prevent West Nile Virus.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT WEST NILE VIRUS?

To avoid contacting West Nile Virus, you will need to avoid mosquitoes as much as you can. The most active time for mosquitoes is in the early morning and early evening. Mosquitoes also like standing water so avoiding areas such as wading pools and creeks can also help. Look for other breeding sites for mosquitoes around your house such as standing water in flower pots and buckets. Make sure you change the water in pet dishes and bird baths often. Drill holes in tire swings so the water will drain out. You can wear long sleeves, pants, and socks or stay indoors during the most active times for mosquitoes. Make sure you have good screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out. The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend insect repellents containing DEET for children younger than two months old and they caution against using any repellent with more than 30 percent DEET on children of any age. Your safest bet is to stick with 10 percent DEET. It is best to not use DEET with sunscreen. The DEET can make the sun-protection factor (SPF) less effective and the need to reapply the sunscreen can result in overexposure to the DEET. Repellents with essential oils from plants like citronella, cedar, eucalyptus, and soybean can help ward off bugs although they are less effective than DEET-containing products. These oils shouldn't be used on babies younger than two months of age. There are some safety features to remember when using insect repellent. Do not soak wristbands as this can cause skin reactions. Spray repellents only in open areas and don't spray near food. Apply DEET and other repellents only to clothing and to exposed skin, but never under clothing. Don't spray near your child's eyes or mouth or on irritated or injured skin. Don't spray directly into the face. You can spray the product on your hands and rub onto your child's skin. Wash your child's skin with soap and water when they come inside and wash treated clothes before wearing again.

SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT THIS HAPPENING TO MY CHILD?

This occurring in our area of Western North Carolina is rare. Of those that are infected, 80% show no symptoms. Up to 20% of those infected will only have mild symptoms. Less than 1% will develop severe symptoms. Of those that develop severe symptoms, this is most common in the elderly and immunocompromised people.