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## Taking the Bite out of West Nile Virus

In the past mosquitoes have been considered a great nuisance affecting the enjoyment of the outdoor environment during the summer months. More recently mosquitoes have been considered a serious threat to public health due to the introduction and spread of the mosquito borne West Nile Virus (WNV). *“Total eradication of the mosquito is an unrealistic and impossible goal”* says Ken Cross, of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors. *“But health risks can be minimized by reducing mosquito populations and taking personal precautions.”*

West Nile Virus is transmitted by the bite of infected mosquitoes. WNV can cause mild disease in people, resulting in symptoms of fever, headache, swollen lymph nodes, muscle ache and skin rash. Less commonly it causes a severe disease with symptoms of headache, fever, stiff neck, muscle weakness, disorientation, coma and if left untreated, death. WNV is usually more severe in the elderly or those in ill health. The incubation period for West Nile Virus is 5 to 15 days. Those who have been exposed to mosquitoes and who are experiencing any of the symptoms should seek early medical attention. Early care has shown to aid in recovery. Even though the chance of a mosquito carrying the WNV is low, the risk is still present.

Knowledge of the mosquito's lifecycle is an important factor in reducing the breeding sites and ultimately the numbers of adult biting mosquitoes around your living space. Mosquitoes target stagnant/standing water to lay their eggs. The lifecycle from egg to flying adult only takes 4 days. This is why it is important to eliminate as much standing water on your property as possible.

Proper yard maintenance and a water draining program should be implemented by all homeowners. Successful programs include such things as eliminating collection sites, slope draining of property to eliminate puddles, removing old tires, and unused items, and routine cleaning of eaves troughs. Water from wading pools and birdbaths should be refreshed every three days. Simple precautions such as emptying rain from garbage cans and screening rain collection barrels will go a long way in eliminating mosquitoes around your property.

Individuals can avoid being bitten by minimizing their exposure to mosquitoes. Reduce time spent out doors at dawn and at dusk when mosquitoes are most active. Wear loose fitting long sleeve shirts and pants that are light in color, as mosquitoes are attracted to darker colors. The use of insect repellents containing DEET or other approved ingredients is very important. For more information on the safe use of DEET-based repellants, sunscreen lotions and the WNV itself, please refer to the Health Canada website at:

[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/westnile/insect\\_repellents.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/westnile/insect_repellents.html)

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