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**CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CENTER OF THE HUDSON VALLEY  
PROTECTING CHILDREN AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS**

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**AUGUST 29, 2012 - CHILDREN'S HEALTH ADVISORY**

**WEST NILE VIRUS**

**August 29, 2012:** The number of reported deaths and infections from West Nile virus continues to rise. So far, 47 states have reported infections in people, birds, and mosquitoes. As of August 28, 2012, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had received reports of 1,590 cases of the virus nationwide, including 66 deaths, up from the 1,118 cases and 41 deaths reported to the agency the week before. This incidence is the highest number of confirmed cases since the virus was first detected in the United States in 1999.

C.D.C. officials say that optimal breeding conditions around the U.S. is partly to blame for this year's record number of West Nile Virus cases and they expect the reported numbers to increase through October.

### **What is West Nile Virus?**

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne virus that is most commonly spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. WNV first appeared in North America in New York City in 1999. Since then, the virus has spread across the continental United States and is considered an emerging infectious disease.

Every year in North America, summers bring about the potential for WNV outbreaks that can continue into the fall season. WNV is a serious infection, and mosquitoes acquire the virus after they feed off of infected birds. The C.D.C. has also investigated cases where WNV was reportedly spread through blood transfusion, breastfeeding, and during pregnancy from mother to baby.

West Nile Virus infection in humans is still considered rare. People who have been infected with WNV develop symptoms between 3 and 14 days after being bitten, lasting from a few days to several weeks. Most children infected with West Nile

virus experience only mild, flu-like symptoms that last a few days. Symptoms may include 1) Fever, 2) Headache, 3) Body aches, 4) Skin rash on trunk of body, and 5) Swollen lymph glands.

The most serious illness resulting from WNV include permanent neurological damage, such as encephalitis, meningitis, and death. However, many people infected with WNV, approximately 4 out of 5, will not exhibit any symptoms at all. The CDC notes that only one (1) in 150 people will develop serious symptoms.

### **Who is at risk?**

Being outdoors for long periods of time puts anyone at risk for WNV infection. The chances for being bitten by a WNV infected mosquito increases with the number of times a person is bitten. Although people who are older than 50 years of age are at a higher risk for severe illness, children and infants can also develop WNV illness, and precaution should be taken to reduce the chances a child will be bitten by mosquitoes.

Currently, there is no vaccine to protect your child from the West Nile virus. But you can reduce his/her likelihood of developing the disease by taking steps to reduce the chances that he/she will be bitten by a mosquito that could be carrying the virus.

### **How to prevent infection from West Nile Virus?**

- **When outdoors, use insect repellent.** The CDC recommends DEET, picardin, IR3535 and oil of lemon. Repellent with less than 10% DEET or picardin can be applied on children. Repellents should not be applied to infants younger than two months old. Sweating, perspiration, or water may require reapplication of the product.
- **Wear long sleeves and pants at dawn and dusk,** when mosquitoes tend to be most active.
- **Consider keeping your child indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening,** as these are peak hours for mosquito bites, especially those mosquitoes that carry the West Nile virus.
- **Stay away from locations where mosquitoes are likely to congregate** or lay their eggs, such as tall grasses, bushes and slow moving or standing water (e.g., in birdbaths and pet water dishes).
- **Install screens** in windows and doors, and repair any damaged screens to keep mosquitoes out of the house. Nets can also be placed over strollers and infant playpens.

Follow these general guidelines to help reduce mosquito populations in your area:

- **Eliminate any standing water that collects on your property** from places such as children's pools, flower pots, buckets, barrels and discarded tires. Turn

over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use. These are breeding grounds for mosquitoes to lay eggs.

- **Make sure roof gutters drain properly** and cleaning clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- **Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs.** If not in use, keep empty and covered.
- **Change the water in bird baths** at least every 3 or 4 days.
- **Remind or help neighbors to eliminate mosquito-breeding sites** on their properties.

**For more information:**

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/wnv/wnvfact.shtml>  
<http://health.westchestergov.com/west-nile-virus->

**References:**

1. *West Nile virus and preventing mosquito bites.* (2012, August 23). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/features/StopMosquitoes/>
2. *West Nile virus: Fight the bite!* (2012, August 24). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>
3. *West Nile virus: What you need to know.* (2012, August 7). Retrieved from [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/wnv\\_factSheet.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/wnv_factSheet.htm)
4. *Schools, day camps and child care.* (2012). Retrieved from <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/wnv/wnvfaq15.shtml>