West Nile Virus Information

Your doctor wants you to have this information about West Nile virus infections. This illness was first found in the USA in 1999, and has since then spread through much of the country. The virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito, and can cause infections in humans, birds, horses, and other animals. **Most of the people who get West Nile virus infection have very mild or no symptoms at all. About 20% of people who get infected have a mild headache, body aches and nausea.** This infection cannot be spread from human to human. Late summer is the time when most cases occur. Special blood tests are needed to confirm the diagnosis, which usually takes several days.

Treatment for this illness is usually not necessary, and no specific medicine is effective against the virus. **Less than 1% of patients become severely ill**. Seizures, paralysis, and brain inflammation are the main problems. Symptoms of this severe form of infection include a high fever, severe headache, confusion, delirium, extreme weakness, nausea, vomiting, and dehydration. Immediate medical attention is needed if any of these symptoms develop.

You can reduce the chance of getting the infection by protecting yourself from mosquito bites. You should wear protective clothing and apply an insect repellant containing DEET if you are around mosquitoes. Stay in doors at dawn and dusk which are the peak mosquito biting periods. If you notice dead crows or jays in your area, it may mean that West Nile virus is in the population. Notify your local or state health department to see if there is a program to have the birds tested.

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