West Nile Virus Information Sheet for Fire Island Community

What is West Nile Virus?
West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause serious illness in humans, birds, and other animals. It was first detected in the United States in 1999 and has since spread across the country.

History in Suffolk County, New York
West Nile Virus has been present in Suffolk County, including Fire Island, since the early 2000s. The virus is most active during the summer and early fall, peaking in July through September. WNV is not new to Suffolk County. In 2010, a year in which the county reported 295 positive mosquito samples beginning in early July (the greatest number found in a single season) the county also reported 25 cases of West Nile virus, including three deaths attributable to the virus.

How is it Transmitted?
West Nile Virus is primarily transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito although the full life cycle of WNV requires mosquitoes feeding on birds. The main type of mosquito responsible for spreading WNV is the Culex species, particularly *Culex pipiens*.

Signs and Symptoms

- Mild Symptoms: Most people (about 80%) infected with WNV will not show any symptoms. However, some may experience mild symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea, or a rash.
- Severe Symptoms: About 1 in 150 people infected with WNV develop severe illness affecting the central nervous system, such as encephalitis or meningitis. Symptoms can include high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, seizures, or paralysis. WNV infection can be fatal particularly in those who are immune compromised.
- Onset: Symptoms typically appear 3 to 14 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

Treatment

- There is no specific antiviral treatment for WNV infection.
- Mild symptoms usually resolve on their own with over-the-counter pain relievers and rest.
- Severe cases may require hospitalization, supportive care, and, in some cases, respiratory support.

Prevention Measures

- Mosquito Control: Eliminate standing water where mosquitoes breed (e.g., birdbaths, gutters, flower pots).

- Personal Protection: Use insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Wear long sleeves and pants, especially during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- Window and Door Screens: Ensure screens on windows and doors are in good condition to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home.
- Community Measures: remove sources of stagnant water around the home as the mosquito responsible for WNV does not travel far.

Vaccines

- Currently, there is no vaccine available for West Nile Virus for humans. However, researchers are working on developing one.

Other Things to Watch For

- Dead Birds: Birds are often the first indicators of West Nile Virus in an area since the infection is fatal to birds. If you see dead birds, especially crows or blue jays, report them to the Suffolk County Health Department, as this could signal the presence of the virus in the community.

Stay Informed

Keep up to date with local health advisories from the Suffolk County Department of Health Services and take proactive steps to protect yourself and your family from mosquito bites. Other sources of information: https://www.cdc.gov/west-nile-virus/index.html

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This information sheet is intended to help keep our Fire Island community safe and informed about West Nile Virus. For more details or updates, please contact local health authorities, visit the Suffolk County Department of Health Services website, or visit https://www.cdc.gov/west-nile-virus/index.html