

How to protect against West Nile

By **Lorrie Coop**

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With temperatures cooling off, mosquitos might not be on everyone's mind right now. However, it's important to remember that West Nile Virus (WNV) and other diseases can be transmitted year round in Texas by infected mosquitoes.

WNV can cause fever, inflammation of the brain, the lining of the brain and the spinal cord. While up to 80 percent of people do not develop symptoms, about 20 percent of infected people will develop a fever with other symp-

toms such as headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea or rash.

Most people with this type of WNV disease recover completely, but fatigue and weakness can last for weeks or months. Less than one percent of infected people develop inflammation of the brain or surrounding tissues. However, people over 60 years of age are at the greatest risk for severe disease. People with certain medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease, and people who have received organ transplants,

are also at greater risk for serious illness.

The incubation period for the virus is usually two to six days, but ranges up to 14 days. Diagnosis of WNV requires a special blood test. Anyone who experiences symptoms of severe WNV illness should see a physician as soon as possible.

Here are some simple ways to protect you and your family from infection:

- Apply EPA-approved insect repellent every time you go outside. If you are also using sunscreen, apply sunscreen first and insect repellent second. Always follow the product label instructions when applying insect repellent to children. Do not use insect repellent on babies younger than two months old. Instead, cover crib, stroller, or baby carrier

with mosquito netting.

- Wear loose-fitting pants and long-sleeve shirts that cover exposed skin.

- Make sure screens are in good repair if you open windows or close windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of your home.

- Remove standing water in and around the home from old tires, planters, or any other containers that can hold water. Mosquito dunks, which can be found in any home and garden center, effectively control mosquito larvae in places where water cannot be drained and are not harmful to fish or other aquatic organisms.

- Change the water in bird baths and pet dishes daily.

- Screen rain barrels and openings to water tanks or wells.