

Information for Schools

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a virus that is found in wild birds and carried by mosquitoes. It was first identified in the province of West Nile, Uganda in 1937. Since then it has been identified in Egypt, Asia, Israel, South Africa, parts of Europe and Australia. In 1999, it was present in the United States for the first time, and in the summer of 2001 was discovered in birds in southern Ontario. In 2002, one bird submitted for testing from our district was positive, in 2003, there were three positive birds and in 2004, there was 10 positive birds.

Are children at risk for becoming infected with WNV while attending school?

The mosquitoes that most commonly carry West Nile Virus are generally more active during the early evening and early morning, so children who attend school during the daytime are at minimal risk for exposure. As a precaution, however, schools are being asked to help protect students by removing breeding areas for mosquitoes.

Can children go on outdoor field trips and play outdoors during the summer?

Since the *Culex pipiens* mosquito, the most common mosquito to carry the virus, is not generally active during the daytime, children who go on field trips or play outdoors during the daytime are at minimal risk for exposure. You should ensure that children are protected against mosquito bites when a field trip is to an area where there are weeds, tall grass or bushes, or it is known for high mosquito activity, or the trip is at dusk, during the evening, night time or at dawn.

Are children at greater risk for becoming infected with West Nile Virus?

Anyone can become infected with the virus if bitten by an infected mosquito. Children, especially younger children, may be more susceptible to a WNV infection just as they are to other infections. Children require adults to help them take precautions against mosquito bites. The same precautions apply to children in school settings as in home settings.

Prevent mosquito bites

Dress children in long pants, long-sleeved shirts, socks and shoes to minimize their exposure to mosquitoes. **Use an insect repellent containing 10% DEET or less.**

For school-aged children under twelve years of age:

A maximum to three applications per day may be used in situations where a high risk of complications from insect bites exists. Only the least concentrated product (10% DEET or less) should be used. The product should be applied sparingly and not be applied to the face and hands. Prolonged use should be avoided.

NOTE: Insect repellents that contain 10% DEET will provide approximately three hours of protection, while 5% DEET will provide approximately two hours.

When using an insect repellent, carefully read and follow the manufacturer's directions. In addition, it is recommended to do the following:

- Do not allow young children to apply DEET products themselves.
- Do not apply DEET directly to children's skin. Apply to your hands and then put it on the child's skin, avoiding the eyes, mouth, and palms of hands. Use liquid or cream repellents that can be applied by hand.
- Wash all treated skin and clothing, where practical, after returning indoors.
- Store DEET, like other chemicals, out of reach of children.

If a child is bitten by a mosquito at school, should he or she be tested for West Nile Virus?

No. Most mosquitoes are not infected with West Nile Virus. Even in areas where mosquitoes do carry the virus, very few mosquitoes - less than 1% - are infected. The chances that any one bite will be from an infected mosquito are very small.

If a child is bitten by an infected mosquito, will he or she get sick?

Most people, including children, who are bitten by mosquitoes carrying West Nile Virus, may experience no symptoms at all or only a mild illness. Parents or caregivers should be contacted immediately if a child develops symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, severe headaches or stiff neck, or if his or her eyes become sensitive to light

Adapted with permission from Halton Region Health Department