

Fight the Bite: Avoid West Nile and other Mosquito-borne Illnesses

Hastings resident Diane Phelps was outside working in her garden when she was bitten by a mosquito just prior to leaving on vacation. At the time, she did not know that the mosquito bite just above her knee was from a mosquito that would infect her with West Nile virus.

She described this bite as a “welt”, being particularly large for a mosquito bite. Initially, she suspected shingles but later suspected she had been infected with West Nile virus.

Diane recalls having a headache and nerve ending pain with “very sensitive skin” while she was on vacation. “I just knew something was wrong” and wondered “Is this going to get worse?” Upon returning to Hastings, she was able to get some lab work done that confirmed her suspicions of West Nile virus illness.

Typical symptoms of West Nile infection can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, disorientation, and paralysis. Milder symptoms can include headache, body aches, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash.

Diane says she has fully recovered, except for some occasional tenderness to her scalp.

Fortunately, most people (4 out of 5) who are infected with West Nile virus do not show any symptoms. However, the health department encourages anyone with symptoms to make an appointment with their doctor because severe symptoms can be permanent or even lead to death.

There are no vaccines for many mosquito-borne illnesses including West Nile virus – making it all the more important to protect yourself from mosquito bites.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests several ways to prevent mosquito bites:

- When you are outdoors, be sure to wear mosquito repellent containing DEET, or other insect repellent that is registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and follow the directions on the package for proper use.
- Wear long pants and sleeves or stay indoors, especially dusk to dawn, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Be sure your home is mosquito proof by checking to see that screens on your windows and doors are in good shape.
- Avoid areas of standing water and be aware of areas where there are many mosquitoes.

Dead birds may be a sign that West Nile virus is circulating between the birds and the mosquitoes in a particular area. If you find a dead bird of the Corvidae family (jays, magpies, crows and ravens) please contact the health department at 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595 to report the bird and find out whether it could be tested for West Nile virus.

Remember to practice the four “**D**”s of effective mosquito bite prevention: **D**usk to dawn (avoid outdoor activity or take extra care to protect yourself), **D**ress Appropriately (long sleeves, pants,

socks when outside during the peak hours and locations of mosquito activity), **DEET** (in your mosquito repellent), **Drain** (any standing water).

Remind your family members and friends of these easy steps to “Fight the Bite.”

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