

RESIDENTIAL PROTECTION AGAINST WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV) *INCLUDING WNV IN ANIMALS*



WNV BASICS (How People Get It)

West Nile virus (WNV) is spread primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes feed on infected birds and can then transmit the virus to humans, horses and other mammals. Most human infections cause no symptoms or only mild illness, but severe infections can affect the nervous system.

Approximately 50 mosquito species have been identified in New Mexico. While most are nuisance species, several are capable of transmitting diseases to people and animals. In New Mexico, West Nile virus is the most common mosquito-borne disease affecting people, and mosquitoes also transmit heartworm, a preventable disease of dogs and cats. In 2025, the New Mexico Department of Health reported 52 human WNV cases and the New Mexico Livestock Board reported 13 equine WNV cases. Nationally, health officials have also reported an unusually early start to the 2026 West Nile virus season, making mosquito bite prevention especially important throughout the summer and early fall. Only female mosquitoes bite because they require a blood meal to produce eggs.

WNV HUMAN SYMPTOMS

Most people infected with West Nile virus never develop symptoms. About 1 in 5 people may develop the following:

- *Fever*
- *Rash*
- *Headache, body aches, or joint pain*
- *Vomiting or diarrhea*

Less than 1% develop severe illness affecting the brain or nervous system, such as encephalitis or meningitis. Seek medical care immediately if symptoms include high fever, confusion, neck stiffness, muscle weakness, or tremors. Adults over 60 years of age, people with certain underlying medical conditions, and people taking medications that affect their immune system are at greater risk for severe disease.

PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR HOME

I. Prevent

Eliminate standing water. Container breeders develop in gutters, flowerpots, birdbaths, tires and other containers. Stagnant-water breeders prefer ditches, abandoned pools, storm drains and organically enriched water. Other species breed in ponds, marshes and floodwater habitats.

II. Create barriers

Use EPA-registered repellents such as DEET, picaridin, IR3535, or plant-based repellents (e.g., citronella), following all label instructions. Wear long sleeves and permethrin-treated clothing when appropriate. Fans, misters, screened porches, head nets and loose-fitting clothing may help reduce mosquito bites.

III. Exterminate

Reduce adult mosquitoes by treating shaded vegetation with EPA-registered insecticides when needed. Protect pollinators by avoiding applications to blooming plants. Mosquito larvicides (*often called "dunks"*) can be used in small ponds or standing water where appropriate to kill aquatic mosquito stages.

IV. Use traps

Commercial CO₂- and heat-based traps, as well as simple homemade yeast-generated CO₂ traps, may help reduce mosquitoes when used as part of an integrated mosquito management program.

Mosquito Activity

The mosquitoes most commonly responsible for spreading West Nile virus are generally most active from dusk through dawn. If you're outdoors during these hours, wear protective clothing and use an EPA-registered insect repellent.

WNV IN ANIMALS

West Nile virus mostly circulates between mosquitoes and birds, with mosquitoes serving as the primary vector. Horses and humans are considered dead-end hosts, meaning they do not typically develop enough virus in their blood to infect mosquitoes and continue the transmission cycle. Horses are highly susceptible (and may develop neurological disease including stumbling, weakness, tremors, paralysis and seizures. Annual vaccination is the best protection against West Nile virus in horses. Transmission to humans and horses occurs primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito and, in rare cases, through blood transfusions, from mother to baby or through organ transplantation. There is no vaccine available for humans.

Dogs and cats rarely become ill from West Nile virus, but they can be susceptible to other mosquito-borne diseases, including heartworm disease. Year-round use of veterinary-approved heartworm preventatives can help protect pets from heartworm disease.

MOSQUITO HABITATS

Mosquitoes require water to complete their life cycle. Depending on the species, eggs are deposited on or near water or on damp soil. Development from egg to adult can be completed in as little as one week under favorable conditions, with adults surviving from several days to several weeks. Many mosquito species fly only short distances from their breeding sites, using carbon dioxide as a primary attractant to locate hosts. Adult mosquitoes typically rest during the day in tall grass, dense shrubs and other cool, shaded vegetation.

Container-breeding mosquitoes develop in clogged gutters, flowerpots, birdbaths, tires, buckets, pet water dishes, toys and other containers that collect rainwater. Some of New Mexico's more aggressive Aedes mosquitoes commonly breed in these habitats.

Other species prefer stagnant water with high organic matter, including storm drains, stagnant ditches, abandoned pools and standing water containing decaying vegetation. Species that transmit West Nile virus commonly utilize these habitats.

Contact your veterinarian or the New Mexico Livestock Board (505-841-6161) if you observe signs of neurologic disease in horses. To report sick wildlife, contact the New Mexico Department of Wildlife (888-248-6866).