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# **West Nile Virus: Recent Surge in Cases Sparks Concern in Texas**

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Peak season in Texas is under way, and there are already 336 cases of West Nile illnesses, including 14 deaths reported as of August 13, making this the largest outbreak of West Nile virus in Texas since 2003. Bruce Clements, Director of Community Preparedness at the Texas Department of State Health Services, tells CDC that Texas is currently seeing more than three times as many cases than previously seen in Texas since 2003. "Texas is on track to have the worst year ever for West Nile virus infections," Clements said. "Assuming normal disease progression, we will outpace 2003, our worst year in terms of the number of cases."

## **What is West Nile virus and how do you get it?**



West Nile virus was first isolated in the West Nile sub-region of Uganda in 1937. The virus first appeared in the United States in 1999 in New York City. Today, we know that mosquitoes get the virus from birds they bite and the virus is spread to humans from mosquito bites.

Roughly one in five infected people get sick when infected with the virus. Most people who do get sick from the virus experience flu-like symptoms that generally last a few days, although some people report having the illness

last for several weeks or longer. Others who get the virus and become ill may develop the more severe form of West Nile virus disease, called West Nile Neuroinvasive Disease (WNND). People who develop WNND may experience headaches, high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis. Although rare, about 10% of people with WNND will die. Of the 336 human cases reported in Texas so far, 200 are the more severe cases.

Not every mosquito carries the virus, and about 80% of people who are infected with West Nile virus will not show any symptoms at all. Still, this virus has made a strong comeback, so precautions should be taken. Awareness and personal protection can be a big step toward reducing your chance of getting infected.

## **Fight the Bite**

The best way to protect yourself from West Nile virus is to avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes. Here are some tips:

- Use insect repellent containing an EPA-registered active ingredient when you're outdoors and always follow the package directions
- Wear long pants and long sleeves to avoid mosquito bites
- Mosquitoes are most active at dusk and dawn. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants at these times or if possible, consider staying indoors during these hours
- Keep mosquitoes out of your home by making sure you have good screens on your windows and doors
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets and barrels. Change the water in pet dishes and replace bird baths weekly. Keep children's wading pools empty and on their sides when they aren't being used.