

## Protect Yourself From West Nile Virus Infections

by James Carrabba (published 6/6/2005 in Country Folks Grower)

Warm weather will be with us soon and unfortunately, with that comes the mosquitoes. The most common route of West Nile Virus infection for people is through the bite of an infected mosquito. As farmers, you spend a lot of time working outdoors and that puts you at risk for being infected by West Nile Virus. West Nile Virus can cause encephalitis, an infection of the brain and spinal cord. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in the U.S. in 2004, there were 2,470 infections and 88 deaths from West Nile Virus. Symptoms generally appear three to 14 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. About four out of five people who are infected will show no symptoms at all. Another 20 percent of infected people will show mild symptoms such as fever, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain. About one in 150 people infected will develop severe illness that can cause permanent neurological damage or death. People over 50 years old are at the highest risk for severe infections. Severe symptoms can include; high fever, headache, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis.

Currently, there is no treatment or vaccine for West Nile Virus. For people who experience no symptoms, or mild symptoms such as fever or headache, the virus will usually pass on its own. People who experience severe symptoms will need medical attention to receive supportive care for the symptoms they are experiencing. Remember, most mosquitoes are not infected and the chance of being infected from any one bite is small; however, you should still take steps to reduce your exposure to mosquitoes. Here are some precautions you can take to reduce your exposure to mosquito bites:

- Avoid working in mosquito-infested areas in the early morning or evening when they are most active. Weedy, bushy, swampy and wooded work areas are likely to have large mosquito populations.
- Use insect repellents and apply them as directed. Products containing Permethrin can only be applied to clothing, not to skin.
- Wear long sleeve shirts, long pants and socks.
- Eliminate sources of standing water. Water that is present for more than four days provides a place for mosquitoes to breed. Change water twice a week in animal drinking tubs.
- Add an aerator to ponds to keep water circulating or add fish that will eat mosquitoes.
- Do not handle dead birds or animals with your bare hands. Use some type of impermeable plastic or rubber gloves to do this.

Following these simple precautions will help reduce the chance that you will get a West Nile Virus infection. All farm owners and farm managers should take the time to train their workers in steps they can take to prevent West Nile Virus infections. We at NYCAMH wish you a safe and productive growing season. To help keep you and your workers safe we are offering on-farm safety surveys and on-farm worker safety trainings at no cost and we would be happy to come to your farm to do a training session on West

Nile Virus prevention. We also offer bilingual training materials that you can use for your current safety training programs. If you need more information, please contact me at 800-343-7527, ext 239 or e-mail me at [jcarrabba@nycamh.com](mailto:jcarrabba@nycamh.com).