



# Prevent West Nile Virus and other Mosquito-borne Illnesses

## **What is mosquito-borne illness?**

Mosquito-borne illness is disease spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. In the Northeastern United States, viruses such as West Nile virus (WNV) or Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus (EEEV) have caused illness. However, the risk of becoming infected with WNV or EEEV following a mosquito bite is low. Most people bitten by infected mosquitoes experience no illness or mild illness but a small number of people can develop disease that is more serious.

## **How is it spread?**

Mosquito-borne illness is spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. Some mosquitoes can get a virus and infect certain birds. Mosquitoes can feed on infected birds. People cannot get these viruses directly from an infected bird. If WNV is found in the blood of an infected person, it may also be spread through blood transfusions and donated organs. It can also pass from a pregnant woman to her unborn child and through breast-feeding. However, routine exposure to a person infected with WNV does not transmit infection.

## **Does mosquito-borne illness occur in Boston?**

WNV has been detected in Boston during the summer months every year since 2000. A small number of human cases have occurred in past years sometimes causing serious illness or death. WNV is expected to re-appear every summer. EEEV is occasionally seen in mosquitoes in Boston. Human cases are extremely rare but can occur.

## **Am I at risk of becoming sick from mosquito bites?**

The time of the year when mosquitoes are most active and most likely to carry disease is usually between late July and late September. However, if the weather remains warm, the risk period can extend as late as November. People at higher risk for developing serious illness from WNV infection are those over age 50. EEEV can cause severe illness in any age group.

## **What should I do if a mosquito bites me?**

Mosquito-borne illness is very rare in Boston. Most mosquitoes don't carry viruses that cause human illness, and the risk of illness following a mosquito bite is small. However, you should see your doctor immediately if you develop high fever, confusion, severe headache, stiff neck, or if your eyes become sensitive to light.

## **Am I supposed to report dead birds?**

Initially, dead birds were collected and tested to determine if mosquito-borne illnesses were in this area. It is now known that mosquito-borne illnesses are in Boston, so additional testing of birds will not provide more useful information. Therefore, dead birds will no longer be collected or tested for mosquito-borne illnesses. If you find a dead bird, you should dispose of it properly. To properly dispose of a dead bird, avoid bare-handed contact (wear thick gloves or use an inverted plastic bag), place the dead bird in a garbage bag and place it into the trash for pick up. Be sure to wash your hands afterwards and to keep the dead bird away from areas where children, animals or others may be able to get into the trash.

# MOSQUITO PROOF BOSTON

# How Can I Protect Myself?

## Follow these steps to prevent mosquito bites:



If you are outdoors in an area with mosquitoes, consider these options:

- Use a mosquito repellent. The most effective repellents contain DEET, but there are several DEET alternatives that have been approved by the EPA (including oil of lemon eucalyptus tree, Picaridin or IR3535). Read the directions on the product label to find out about precautions that need to be taken, how long the product offers protection and how often the product needs to be reapplied. After returning indoors, wash off repellent with soap and water.
- If you use a product containing DEET, do not use concentrations of more than 30% on adults and use low concentrations of DEET on children. Apply DEET to exposed skin (not eyes or mouth) only and do not use it on open cuts or wounds. Do not let children apply DEET themselves. Do not apply DEET on infants (mosquito netting can be used over infant carriers).
- Wear protective clothing such as long sleeved shirts, long pants and socks.



Although mosquitoes can bite at any time of day, try to limit time outdoors between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active (or use above precautions).

Make sure window and door screens don't have holes in them. Screens in good condition will help prevent mosquitoes from getting inside your house.

## Follow these steps to prevent mosquitoes from breeding:

Mosquitoes need water to breed. They can develop into adults in as little as a week. Make sure items like those below don't collect water, or that you clean them out regularly.

**Containers** - Turn over or cover unused flower pots, buckets, garbage cans, and wheelbarrows. Change water in birdbaths once a week.

**Gutters** - Remove leaves and other debris that can clog gutters and trap water.

**Pools** - Cover unused swimming pools and turn over kiddie pools when not in use. Be sure to keep swimming pool covers clear of leaves and water.

**Old Tires** - Cover or dispose of them. They are a favorite mosquito-breeding site.



For more information, call the Boston Public Health Commission  
at 617-534-5611 or visit [www.bphc.org](http://www.bphc.org)