



# EL PASO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

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## West Nile Virus

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What is West Nile virus?**

**A:** A virus that is carried long distances by infected birds and then spread locally by mosquitoes that feed on these birds. Infected mosquitoes can then bite and pass the virus to humans and animals, such as horses.

**Q: How many cases of West Nile virus have Colorado and El Paso County reported?**

**A:** Data reflects that El Paso County’s first lab-confirmed cases of West Nile virus in people was in 2003, which also was the county’s worst year.

West Nile Virus Human Cases and Deaths by Year, 2003-2008						
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>EPC Cases</b>	114	2	1	5	4	0
<b>CO Cases</b>	2947	291	106	345	578	71
<b>EPC Deaths</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>CO Deaths</b>	63	4	2	7	7	1

**Q: What are the symptoms of West Nile virus infection?**

**A:** Symptoms usually appear 5-15 days after a person is bitten by an infected mosquito. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, headache, muscle weakness, rash, stiff neck or changed mental state.

**Q: Can West Nile virus infection be a serious illness?**

**A:** West Nile virus infection can cause serious illnesses, include infection of the brain. People with serious illness may develop long-term illness and disability. West Nile virus can affect any age group.

**Q: What can I do to protect myself and my family?**

**A: Take these important steps:**

- Wear insect repellent with DEET.
- DRAIN standing water to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in tires, flower pots and the like.
- Limit outdoor activity at DUSK and DAWN when mosquitoes are most active.
- DRESS in pants and long sleeves when possible.
- TREAT ponds and livestock tanks with larvacide such as “doughnuts.”

**Q: Why is it important to drain standing water?**

**A:** Mosquitoes breed in standing water. Lakes and other bodies of water large enough to have regular wave action are less likely to harbor mosquito larvae, as are bodies of water containing small fish, which eat the larvae. Mosquito eggs hatch in seven to 10 days, so emptying water weekly around your property helps to remove larvae.

**Be sure to drain water that might accumulate in these kinds of areas:**

- Storm drain systems
- Tires
- Neglected/abandoned swimming pools
- Bird baths, pet dishes, flower pots and ornamental ponds
- Clogged house gutters

**Q: What should I do if I can't drain the water?**

**A:** Apply larvacide to kill developing mosquitoes before they can bite. A common form of larvacide is available as doughnut-shaped "dunks" at garden and home improvement stores. This larvacide is safe for wildlife and pets.

**For more information, visit:**

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, [www.cdphe.state.co.us](http://www.cdphe.state.co.us)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- Fight the Bite Colorado, [www.fightthebitecolorado.com](http://www.fightthebitecolorado.com)