



Department of Health  
Agency of Human Services



## Fight the Bite: Protect yourself from mosquito-borne illnesses this summer

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BURLINGTON – Vermonters may be swatting more mosquitoes than usual this summer because of the record-breaking spring rains – and some of these insects bring the possibility for mosquito-borne illnesses.

Human illness caused by mosquitoes is uncommon in the state, but recent evidence of two, **West Nile virus** and **Eastern Equine Encephalitis**, means that it's worth taking simple precautions to avoid bites.

West Nile virus was first introduced to Vermont in 2000. Although the last reported case of human illness occurred in 2003, and the last reported case of illness in a horse was in 2005, the virus has been detected in a small number of mosquitoes or birds every year of the past decade.

There has never been a case of Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) in humans or horses in Vermont, but this virus has caused human and animal illness in bordering states and Quebec. In 2010, testing of deer and moose samples confirmed that EEE virus is here, too.

“While the risk of illness from these viruses is still low in Vermont, it is not zero,” said Erica Berl, an infectious disease epidemiologist with the Health Department. “It is important for people to take precautions to prevent mosquito bites.”

During the 2010 hunting season, blood was collected from more 500 deer and moose presented at check stations throughout the state. Eleven percent of the samples tested positive for antibodies against the virus, which means that these animals had been exposed to EEE virus in the past. Deer and moose were chosen due to the ease of collecting samples.

“We don’t believe the virus will harm the deer or moose herd,” Berl said, “and there is no evidence that hunting or eating deer or moose is a risk for people.”

### Fight the Bite!

- Wear long sleeves and pants and avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active – especially in marshes and hardwood (cedar) wetlands.
- Reduce mosquito breeding habitats by getting rid of standing water. Drain areas where water can pool such as rain gutters, wading pools, and any other water-holding containers such as old tires.
- If you are outside when mosquitoes are biting, use an effective insect repellent. Choose repellents that have an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registration number on the label. This indicates that the product has been evaluated for safety and effectiveness. Repellents that contain no more than 30 percent DEET are safe and effective for children and adults. When using insect repellent, always follow the directions on the label.
- Install or repair screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out.
- Protect your animals. Horses are susceptible to WNV and EEE virus infection, and there are effective vaccines available. Llamas, alpacas and emus are also susceptible and can be immunized with the horse vaccine. Contact your health care provider if you have questions about your health or need medical attention.

### Symptoms of West Nile virus and EEE

Most people who are infected with WNV or EEE virus will not become ill. Those who become ill will have flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, fatigue, joint and body aches. These symptoms typically last one or two weeks, and recovery is usually complete.

However, both viruses have the potential to invade the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) and cause more serious illness. Symptoms of severe disease include fever, intense headache, weakness, poor coordination, irritability,

drowsiness and mental status changes. About one-third of people who develop severe EEE disease die, and many who recover are left with disabilities. Fortunately, severe EEE is rare.

### **Dead Bird Hotline Starts June 21**

As part of the surveillance for West Nile virus, the Health Department's dead bird hotline will start again on June 21. Anyone who finds a dead bird is asked to report it to the Health Department by calling 800-913-1139 during regular business hours. Some of these birds will be tested at the Health Department Laboratory.

For more information on West Nile Virus and EEE, visit the Vermont Department of Health website at [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov).

For additional information on mosquitoes visit the [Vermont Agency of Agriculture website](#)

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