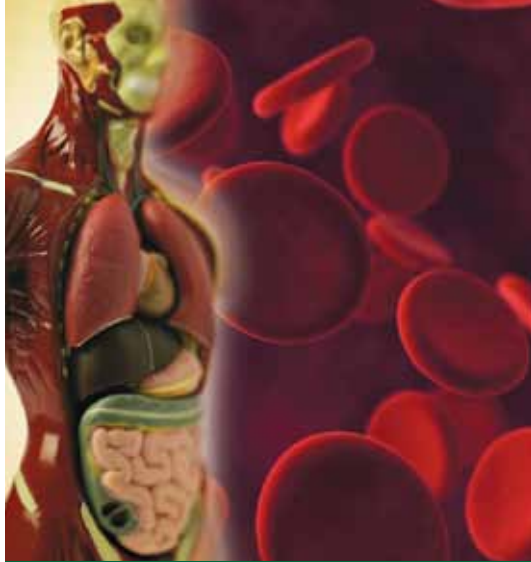




JUST THE FACTS

WEST NILE VIRUS

BLOOD, ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION



Canada had its first confirmed case of mosquito transmitted West Nile virus in 2002. While the risk of West Nile virus infection is low and the risk of serious health effects from the virus is even lower, it is important for everyone to take steps to reduce their risk of getting bitten by mosquitoes.

WHAT IS... West Nile Virus?

The West Nile virus (WNV) is a mosquito transmitted virus that can be transferred to humans from the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected when it bites a bird with WNV.

There is no evidence to suggest that you can get WNV by touching or kissing an infected person. There is also no evidence that the virus can pass from infected animals, such as horses or pets, to people. However, it is still important to follow standard health and safety practices when handling dead birds or animals, such as wearing protective gloves.

Should I donate blood if I have been bitten by a mosquito?

Yes. The risk of West Nile virus infection is low and every unit of donated blood is tested for WNV. Being bitten by a mosquito does not disqualify anyone from donating. However, people are not permitted to donate if they are experiencing flu-like symptoms. In addition, donors are informed to call their local donor clinic immediately if they develop any symptoms after donating.

Donors can't get infected with WNV by giving blood.

What if I need to receive a transfusion or transplant?

WNV cannot be transmitted through fractionated blood products, such as plasma. However, it is possible for WNV to be transmitted through blood transfusions and organ transplants. Although there have been very few confirmed cases of this happening.

It's important to understand that the benefits of blood transfusions and organ transplants outweigh the risk of WNV. Additionally, there are several safeguards in place to ensure the safety of Canada's blood supply.

What is being done to ensure that Canada's blood supply is safe?

- Both Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec, the only blood operators in Canada, test all blood for West Nile virus before it is released into the blood supply.
- Any units that are found to contain WNV are withdrawn and donors will be deferred from giving blood again for 56 days.
- Health Canada conducts regular inspections of blood establishments to ensure blood operators follow current laws and regulations.

Why are people with confirmed cases of West Nile virus infection allowed to donate blood again after eight weeks?

- West Nile virus only stays in the blood of an infected person for four to seven days.
- After that, the person's blood contains antibodies to the virus, but does not contain the virus itself.
- West Nile virus infection is only spread through blood if it contains live virus.
- Donors can donate blood again after a period of eight weeks, which is the normal donation cycle. This period also permits an extra margin of safety to ensure that the virus is no longer present.

What happens if someone with a confirmed case of WNV gives blood?

If there is a human case of WNV, the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit reports the name to the Canadian Blood Services. If any of these people have made recent blood donations, any of their blood remaining in the system is destroyed. If any of the blood from such a donation has already been given to patients, the recipients' doctors are informed so the appropriate follow-up work can be conducted.

For more information.

Other "Just the Facts" information sheets on West Nile virus:

- West Nile Virus
- Pregnancy and Breastfeeding
- Protecting Young Children
- Protecting the Elderly
- Protecting Campers
- Protecting Outdoor Workers
- For Veterinarians

Windsor-Essex County Health Unit

www.wechealthunit.org/diseases-conditions • 519-258-2146

References:

Health Canada. (2006). *West Nile virus – protect yourself!* Retrieved May 22, 2007, from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/wn-no/index_e.html

What is the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit doing?

In 2010 the Health Unit, along with each municipality, will continue to conduct human surveillance to monitor for West Nile virus. The larviciding program will continue throughout the 2010 summer season, along with investigating standing water complaints and distributing educational materials, such as this "Just the Facts" sheet.

For more information about larvicides, visit the Ministry of Environment at www.ene.gov.on.ca/envision/land/westnile.

What if I find a dead bird?

If you find a dead bird report it to Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre by calling 1-866-673-4781.

If you need to dispose of a dead bird:

- Use rubber gloves and a shovel to handle the carcass.
- Bury the carcass at least 1 m (3 ft) deep (it is not recommended that you use a vegetable garden), or double bag the bird in sealed plastic bags and place in the garbage for pickup.
- Throw away the rubber gloves and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.