

It's time to prepare for West Nile Virus.

West Nile Virus is spread by mosquitoes. Infection with the virus can cause severe and sometimes fatal illness. There were 3000 reported cases of West Nile disease in the US during 2005, including 119 deaths.

To help you prepare for mosquito season, read the truth about some common West Nile virus myths:

Five Common Myths about West Nile Virus

Myth #1: There's not much I can do about West Nile virus.

Truth: There is a lot that you, personally, can do to reduce your chance of West Nile virus infection.

- Reduce the number of mosquito bites you get. Make a habit of using insect repellent with DEET when outdoors. Spray repellent on exposed skin and clothing. Get the details about [safe repellent use](#).
- Prime mosquito-biting hours are usually dusk to dawn. Pay special attention to protection during these hours, or avoid being outdoors.
- You can reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home. Mosquitoes breed in standing water, so check your yard once a week: get rid of containers that aren't being used, empty water from flower pots, change water in bird baths and maintain clean gutters.
- Make sure window and door screens are in good condition. Have an older neighbor or family member? See if they need help installing or repairing screens.



Avoid mosquito bites by applying insect repellent when spending time outdoors. Use repellent safely. Always read and follow product instructions.

Myth #2: Kids are at the most danger of getting sick from West Nile virus.

Truth: People over 50 are at the highest risk for developing severe West Nile disease.

- Relatively few children have been reported with [severe West Nile Virus disease](#). By contrast, most of the deaths due to WNV during 2002 were among people over 50 years old. Half of those deaths were among people over 77 years old.
- It is always a good idea for children to avoid mosquito bites, but it's also important for adults - especially older adults - to take steps to avoid mosquito bites. [Click here for suggestions on how to avoid mosquito bites.](#)

Myth #3: It's only people who are already in poor health who have to worry about West Nile virus.

Truth: Healthy, active older adults who spend time working and exercising outdoors have been affected by severe West Nile virus infection.

- Being over 50 is a risk factor for developing severe West Nile disease if infected with the virus. There is a risk of getting mosquito bites while leading an active life outdoors. This doesn't mean you have to stay inside - it does mean that it's important to use [repellent](#) when you go outside.

Myth #4: Repellents containing DEET are not safe.

Truth: Repellents containing DEET are very safe when used according to directions.

- Because DEET is so widely used, a great deal of testing has been done. When manufacturers seek registration with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for products such as DEET, laboratory testing regarding both short-term and long-term health effects must be carried out.
- There are products with different strengths (percentage of DEET) available. The longer the protection you need the higher percent of DEET needed.
- Repellent with DEET can be used for both adults and children, according to directions
- Click here for much more information on [using repellents safely](#).

Myth #5: As long as my area has a mosquito control program, I don't have to worry about using repellent.

Truth: Mosquito control activities don't eliminate every mosquito, so personal protection is still important.

- Public activities, such as using products to kill mosquito larvae and adult mosquitoes, are one part of control. Personal protection, such as using repellent, keeping window screens in good condition, and control of household breeding sites are other important steps.
- Collaboration between the community, the family and the individual is needed to achieve the best prevention of West Nile virus infection.