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CDC Says There Are 5 Myths About West Nile

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, there are five common myths about West Nile Virus.

The myths and truths contained in this article represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control.

Myth No. 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, but 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.

Myth No. 2: Kids are at the most danger of getting sick from West Nile Virus.

Truth: People more than 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 are among people over 50 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.

Myth No. 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 No. 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 lot of testing has been done. When manufacturers seek registration with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 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.

Myth No. 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.