

# West Nile Virus: mosquitoes are more than an annoyance

by Dr. Delia Chiamonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



Mosquitoes are more than annoying – they can be dangerous.

Mosquitoes annoy me, but they don't usually scare me. However, when I was in Africa I felt differently. In the early afternoon, when the mosquitoes were trolling for a blood meal, I was acutely aware of the risk of Malaria that might accompany a bite. I tended to stay inside.

Until now I have never felt this way at home, but I am developing a quiet concern. Our home-grown mosquitoes are becoming more dangerous, since they can carry viruses including West Nile Virus, Equine Encephalitis and others. We need to keep the risk in perspective, of course – there have been only 236 human cases of West Nile Virus in 28 states so far this year. It is significantly more likely that you will be in a serious car wreck than that you will contract West Nile. But still...

The CDC identified 3,083 mosquito pools positive for West Nile Virus in the U.S., which can cause serious neurological disease such as meningitis and encephalitis. The virus is most prevalent in August and September and it is transmitted only by mosquitoes – never from person to person.

The symptoms of West Nile Virus vary greatly. Many people actually have no symptoms at all. For those who do develop symptoms, they usually occur between 5 and 15 days after the mosquito bite and can include fever, headache and malaise. In rare cases, more severe symptoms such as stiff neck, disorientation, tremors, coma or even death can occur.

The risk is low that any given mosquito bite will lead to a serious infection, but I have a feeling that the risk will increase over time. It is probably time to elevate mosquitoes from pest to threat, even though the threat is low.

Some basic precautions can decrease the risk of a bite. Use bug spray if you are outside in the early evening, wear long pants and sleeves if you can stand it, fix the holes in your screens and don't allow any standing water (which mosquitoes use to breed) in your backyard.

Enjoy the last of the summer.

Dr. C.

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