

Seniors' Chat

Protect Yourself – West Nile Virus - July 2009

Now that it's summer, you're likely spending more time outdoors. Along with being outside comes an increased risk of contracting mosquito-borne viruses such as West Nile Virus (WNV). Be aware of the potential health risks and take preventive steps to protect yourself and those around you.

Most people who become infected experience no symptoms or have very mild illness (fever, headaches, body aches). However, the virus can result in serious neurological illness such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) which can have long-term complications and even cause death.

How is the virus spread? - West Nile Virus is transmitted to people through bites from infected mosquitoes. There are many types of mosquitoes, most of which are only nuisance mosquitoes. The main carriers of WNV in Saskatchewan are *Culex tarsalis* mosquitoes, most abundant during July and August.

Who is at risk? - The risk of WNV varies from year to year, depending on the mosquito population and the weather. The risk is higher if you are active and outside on the farm, at the cottage, camping, hiking, gardening or golfing. If you are exposed to infected mosquitoes, you are at risk.

What can I do? - Personal protection and reducing mosquito habitats will help reduce the



Hon. Don McMorris

risk of West Nile Virus to you and your family. A few tips:

- *Cover Up* – Most mosquitoes are active at dusk and dawn. If you need to be outside when mosquitoes are active, wear light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing with long sleeves, long pants and socks.

- *Apply repellent* – Anytime you are outdoors, you should wear repellent. Products with DEET are recommended. DEET is

safe and doesn't require a heavy application, especially if you are outside for only a few hours. For any repellent, be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions.

- *Clean up around the house and yard.* Get rid of standing water in which mosquitoes can lay their eggs.
- *Check window and door screens for holes.*
- *Clear eaves troughs* throughout the summer.
- *Maintain your yard and lawn* to reduce resting sites for adult mosquitoes.

If you'd like more WNV information, please visit our website at www.health.gov.sk.ca.

If you have any ideas or concerns about issues relating to seniors, please write to me at Room 302, Legislative Building, 2405 Legislative Drive, Regina, S4S 0B3, or phone my office (306) 787-7345.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don McMorris".

Don McMorris
Minister of Health



Saskatchewan
Ministry of
Health