**What is West Nile Virus (WNV) and could I become sick from it?**

Experts believe WNV is established as a seasonal epidemic in North America that flares up in the summer and continues into the fall.

University Health Services has received several inquiries from students, faculty and staff regarding information about this virus and the current outbreak. Here are some basic facts that you should know:

**Fact 1: This illness isn’t new to the United States, and doesn’t typically result in death**

* According to information provided by the CDC since 1999, more than 30,000 people in the United States have been reported as getting sick with West Nile virus.
* As of September 11, 2012, 48 states have reported West Nile virus infections in people, birds, or mosquitoes. A total of 2,636 cases of West Nile virus disease in people, including 118 deaths, have been reported to CDC. 4 of those confirmed cases were in NC.
* Approximately 80 percent of people (about 4 out of 5) who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all.
* About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent. Individuals with these symptoms should consult a physician immediately.

**Fact 2: Most often, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito:**

* Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can then spread WNV to humans and other animals when they bite.
* In a very small number of cases the virus also has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and even during pregnancy from mother to baby.
* WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus

**Fact 3: The most effective way to prevent the spread of WNV is protect from mosquito bites:**

* Protect yourself from mosquito bites
  + Apply insect repellent to exposed skin. Generally, the the more active ingredient a repellent contains the longer it can protect you from mosquito bites. A higher percentage of active ingredient in a repellent does not mean that your protection is better—just that it will last longer
* Eliminate mosquito habitats
  + Dispose of unused containers, dump extra water in your flower pots
  + Frequently change the water in animal drinking bowls and bird baths.
  + Pick up kids toys such as swimming pools and buckets where stagnant water can collect. Make sure that anything around your house does not hold standing water
  + Make sure that gutters drain properly.

**Fact 4: There is not a vaccine or medication available to treat WNV.**

* There is no specific treatment for WNV infection. In cases with milder symptoms, people experience symptoms such as fever and aches that pass on their own, although even healthy people have become sick for several weeks.
* In more severe cases, people usually need to go to the hospital where they can receive supportive treatment including intravenous fluids, help with breathing and nursing care.

For more information, please visit the CDC website and information pages related to West Nile at [**http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm**](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm)