



# News Release

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## **West Nile virus expands in Washington; possible human infections reported**

**OLYMPIA** — Two state residents are being considered “probable” West Nile virus infection cases. The state Department of Health announced the lab results today. State health officials believe both people were infected in Washington.

A Yakima County woman in her 50s and a King County man in his 30s are considered probable West Nile infection cases after testing at the state’s Public Health Laboratories in Shoreline. After the initial test results, samples have been sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for confirmation.

The Yakima County resident developed a fever, headache, and muscle aches. She did not travel outside the county during her exposure period. The King County resident developed meningitis, a more serious symptom of this disease. He’s believed to have been infected while traveling in Yakima and Benton Counties. Both people were exposed in mid-August. This is an excellent reminder of the importance of preventing mosquito bites to avoid West Nile virus infection and other mosquito-borne illnesses.

“West Nile virus can be a very serious disease for a small number of people, especially those older than 50,” said Dr. Marcia Goldoft, acting state epidemiologist for communicable disease. “Some people who are infected may never have severe symptoms, but it’s wise to try to avoid mosquito bites to prevent infection. West Nile virus activity is increasing in our state, so it’s vital to take the simple precautions that can help protect you from West Nile infection.”

So far this year, environmental monitoring has detected West Nile virus in 41 mosquito samples, 25 horses, and six birds — all in eastern Washington.

People can avoid mosquito bites at home or on the road by following a few precautions: be sure that door and window screens are working; stay indoors around dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active; and if you do go outside, use a mosquito repellent when mosquitoes are active. Those involved in extended outdoor activities such as farming, hiking, attending sports events, or fishing, and hunting should be careful to avoid insect bites. Always follow label instructions when using mosquito repellents.

It's also important to reduce mosquito habitat around the home. Turning over old buckets or cans; emptying water from old tires; and frequently changing water in birdbaths, pet dishes, and water troughs helps eliminate the small puddles of water in which many mosquito larvae grow.

West Nile infection can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the spinal cord and brain). People over age 50 have the highest risk for serious illness. Younger people can also develop serious complications from the disease.

Mosquitoes become infected with West Nile virus by feeding on infected birds, and then pass the virus to uninfected birds, people, horses, or other hosts. Crows, ravens, magpies, and jays are especially susceptible to dying from the virus. State and local public health monitor for West Nile virus by tracking mosquito samples, horses, and dead birds.

The Department of Health West Nile virus information line 1-866-78-VIRUS (1-866-788-4787) and the agency's [West Nile virus Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/WNV) (www.doh.wa.gov/WNV) are excellent resources for anyone who wants to learn more.

The Department of Health is working with local health partners as well as other state agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Ecology, and Fish and Wildlife on West Nile virus monitoring, planning, control, and prevention.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for a healthy dose of information.