

## 6 Elements of a Plan for Protecting Workers from West Nile



The US has recently seen a surge in reported cases of the West Nile Virus, which is mainly transmitted to people through the bite of a mosquito that has become infected by feeding on the blood of birds carrying the virus.

According to the CDC, the 4,249 cases reported so far in 2012 is the highest number of West Nile cases reported to the CDC through the second week in October since 2003.

Almost 70% of the cases have been reported from eight states' Texas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Dakota, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Illinois' and over a third of all cases have been reported from Texas.

The number of deaths due to West Nile stands at 168 to date.

Canada hasn't been as hard hit, with only 421 reported cases through Oct. 6, 2012 in Ontario, Qu bec and Manitoba primarily. But getting bit by an infected mosquito is still a risk for some Canadian workers, especially those who regularly work outside.

Although most people who are infected don't have symptoms, the rest will develop one of two types of infections:

- West Nile Non-Neurological Syndrome, which can have symptoms including headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, skin rash and swollen lymph glands that usually resolve within 3 to 6 days.
- West-Nile Neurological Syndrome, a severe infection that can include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness and paralysis.

Saskatchewan recommends that employers develop and implement a plan to protect workers from mosquito bites and thus West Nile. That plan should:

1. Identify workers at increased risk of mosquito bites because of the nature or location of their duties.
2. Inform these workers of:

- how they could be exposed to West Nile
- the transmission and infection characteristics of West Nile
- the signs and symptoms of infection
- what to do if they feel they have the symptoms of West Nile
- when and where mosquitoes are most active.

3. When possible, limit outdoor work:

- when mosquitoes are more active, i.e., at dawn and at dusk and in still, warm, cloudy and humid weather conditions; and
- where mosquito numbers are typically higher, i.e., near stagnant ponds, watering troughs, manure lagoons and other stagnant bodies of water. They're often more abundant in shaded, woody and bushy areas.

4. Ensure that any outside door and window screens fit tightly and have no holes.

5. Include steps to reduce mosquito numbers around the workplace or outdoor site. For example, include steps to:

- regularly reduce standing water, such as eliminate by turning over or regularly (at least twice per week) emptying receptacles like tarps, buckets, wheelbarrows or tires that can accumulate water. If this isn't possible, aerate standing water, cover it with screens or fill in ruts, ditches, low spots, etc. that accumulate water; and
- regularly clean eave troughs of buildings.

6. Provide engineering controls and equipment, including PPE, if necessary, to prevent sharps injuries and other direct contact with blood and body fluids of potentially infected animals, particularly birds.