

## West Nile Virus: Schools, Summer Camps and Daycares

West Nile virus (WNV) is a virus that is found in wild birds and carried by mosquitoes. It was first identified in the province of West Nile, Uganda in 1937. Since then it has been identified in Egypt, Asia, Israel,

South Africa, parts of Europe and Australia. In 1999, it was present in the United States for the first time, and in the summer of 2001 was discovered in birds in southern Ontario, including Halton. In 2002 human cases were first identified in Canada, including Halton.

### Is my child at risk for becoming infected with West Nile virus while attending school?

The mosquitoes that most commonly carry West Nile virus are generally more active during the early evening and early morning, so children who attend school during the daytime are at minimal risk for exposure. As a precaution, however, schools are

being asked to help protect students by removing standing water, which may be a breeding area for mosquitoes.

### Can children go on outdoor field trips and play outdoors during the summer?

Since the mosquitoes that most commonly carry West Nile virus are generally more active during the early evening and early morning, children who go on trips during the daytime are at minimal risk for exposure.

If a field trip is to an area where there is high mosquito activity, or if the trip is at dusk, during the evening, or at dawn, students should be advised to take precautions against mosquito bites.

### Are children or infants at greater risk for becoming infected with West Nile virus?

Anyone can become infected with the virus if bitten by an infected mosquito. Children require adults to help them take precautions against mosquito bites. The same precautions apply to children in school settings as in home settings.

Most people, including children, who are bitten by mosquitoes carrying West Nile virus may experience no

symptoms or a very mild illness. Parents or caregivers should contact a doctor immediately if a child develops symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, severe headaches, stiff neck, or if his or her eyes become sensitive to light.

### Prevent Mosquito Bites

- *Cover up.* Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved shirts and pants with fabric thick enough to prevent mosquitoes from biting. Shoes and socks are also recommended.
- *Use an insect repellent* if required. Repellents need only be used if you are going to be outdoors during the early evening to morning hours when mosquitoes tend to be feeding, or when in a wooded, shaded or swampy area.
  - Repellents that contain DEET (N,N-diethyl- m-toluamide) or Icaridin (hydroxyethyl isobutyl piperidine carboxylate, also known as picaridin) are most effective. DEET based products are available with concentrations of 5% to 30%. Icaridin products are available in concentrations up to 20%. Ensure that you choose the correct DEET containing product that is suitable for the age of the person and for the time spent outdoors. This information is on the label.
  - Other repellants besides DEET and Icaridin are available in Canada as well, although data on their safety and effectiveness is sparse. When using any insect repellent, carefully read and strictly follow the manufacturer's directions. Even non-DEET or Icaridin repellents have restrictions on their use. For more information see the Health Department fact sheet on *Insect Repellents*.

## Health Precautions for Insect Repellents

When using an insect repellent, carefully read and follow the manufacturer's directions. In addition, it is recommended to do the following:

- Do not allow young children to apply insect repellent products themselves.
- Do not apply insect repellent directly to children. Apply to your hands and then put it on the child's skin, avoiding the eyes, mouth and palms of hands. Best to use liquid or cream repellents that can be applied by hand.
- If child is attending summer camp, ensure that they know how to use the products properly.
- Wash all treated skin and clothing after returning indoors.
- Store insect repellents, like other chemicals, out of reach of young children.

There are very specific recommendations regarding the use of insect repellents containing DEET on children from birth to 12 years. Icaridin products should not be used on infants under six months of age. For more information, please see the Health Department's fact sheet on *Insect Repellents*.