

WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS? RUSSIA WARNS OF INCREASE IN CASES

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

Russia today warned of a possible increase in West Nile virus infections this autumn as mild temperatures and heavy precipitation create favourable conditions for the mosquitos that carry it. Scientists have said that milder temperatures attributed to climate change could cause diseases such as the West Nile virus to become more widespread.

"In light of favourable climatic conditions this year - an abundance of precipitation... a warm and long autumn, a high number of (virus) carriers could be observed in the autumn," Rospotrebnadzor, Russia's consumer health watchdog, said.

Originally from Africa, the virus has spread in Europe, Asia and North America. It is mainly transmitted through mosquito bites. More than 80% of Russia's West Nile fever cases are recorded in its southwest region.

What is West Nile virus?

According to America's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [West Nile virus](#) (WNV) is the leading cause of mosquito-borne disease in the continental United States. It is most commonly spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito.

Originally from Africa, the virus has spread in Europe, Asia and North America. It is mainly transmitted through mosquito bites and can lead to a fatal neurological disease in humans, although most people infected never develop any symptoms.

According to CDC, West Nile virus cases mostly occur during mosquito season, which starts in the summer and continues through fall. There are no vaccines to prevent or medications to treat West Nile virus in people and about 1 in 5 people who are infected develop a fever and other symptoms. About 1 out of 150 infected people develop a serious, sometimes fatal, illness, says CDC, adding that a person can reduce your risk of WNV by using insect repellent and wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants to prevent mosquito bites.

Symptoms of West Nile virus

According to CDC, most people (8 out of 10) infected with West Nile virus do not develop any symptoms. About 1 in 5 people who are infected develop a fever with other symptoms such as headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea, or rash. Most people with febrile illness due to West Nile virus recover completely, but fatigue and weakness can last for weeks or months.

However, adds CDC, about 1 in 150 people who are infected develop a severe illness affecting the central nervous system such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord).

Symptoms of severe illness include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis.

Severe illness can occur in people of any age; however, people over 60 years of age are at

greater risk for severe illness if they are infected (1 in 50 people). People with certain medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease, and people who have received organ transplants, are also at greater risk.

According to CDC, recovery from severe illness might take several weeks or months and some effects to the central nervous system might be permanent.

Over-the-counter pain relievers can be used to reduce fever and relieve some symptoms but in severe cases, patients often need to be hospitalized to receive supportive treatment, such as intravenous fluids, pain medication, and nursing care. *(With Reuters Inputs)*

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