

# West Nile Virus



## Animal Care Services

Health Care Agency — Regulatory Health Services

**With concern growing over the spread of West Nile Virus (WNV), here are some frequently asked questions about WNV and pets like dogs and cats.**

**Q: Can West Nile virus cause illness in dogs or cats?**

A. Yes, but this apparently occurs very rarely. WNV does not usually cause severe illness in dogs and cats. It is important that pets showing symptoms of a neurologic illness be evaluated for other, more likely causes.

**Q: How do dogs and cats become infected with WNV?**

A. Dogs and cats can be infected with WNV in the same manner as birds, horses and people: through the bite of an infected mosquito.

**Q: Can a pet infected with WNV infect people or other pets?**

A. There is no evidence of human-to-human or pet-to-human transmission. There also is no evidence that WNV is transmitted between pets. Only an infected mosquito can transmit the virus. Infected pets are unlikely to transmit the virus back into the mosquito population.

**Q: What can I do to protect my pets from WNV?**

A. There is not a WNV vaccine currently available for dogs and cats. The most effective way to prevent infection with West Nile Virus is to eliminate mosquito-breeding sites (areas of stagnant water) around your home and property. Spot flea products are reportedly not effective at repelling or killing mosquitoes. However, flea sprays containing pyrethrins may have some value as repellents. Follow label directions carefully. Never use an insect repellent on your pets unless it is specifically approved for such use.

**Q. What is the treatment for an animal infected with WNV? Should a dog or cat infected with WNV be destroyed?**

A. Treatment would be supportive and consistent with standard veterinary practices for animals infected with a viral agent. There is no reason to destroy an animal just because it has been infected with WNV.

