

NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT
Increased Numbers of West Nile Cases in New Mexico in 2023

August 18, 2023

Background: The New Mexico Department of Health is urging healthcare providers to consider West Nile virus (WNV) in their differential diagnosis for patients with altered mental status or clinical signs and symptoms of viral meningitis/encephalitis as 15 WNV cases have been identified across the state since late July. West Nile virus is circulating at high levels throughout the state with above-average case counts in both humans and horses to date this year. The highest number of cases are traditionally seen through August and September. Over the past ten years, between 6 – 40 WNV cases have been identified, with an average of 21 cases per year.

While most WNV infections are asymptomatic, roughly 20% have a mild illness with symptoms that may include fever, headache, fatigue, myalgia, arthralgia, gastrointestinal symptoms, and a maculopapular rash. Neuroinvasive WNV infection occurs in less than 1% of infected individuals. Patients with neuroinvasive disease present with signs and symptoms of encephalitis, meningitis, and/or acute flaccid paralysis.

Recommendations for Clinicians: Healthcare providers are encouraged to include WNV on their differential for individuals who present with fever or acute neurologic symptoms and with recent exposure to mosquitoes.

Commercial laboratories provide immunoassays for WNV-specific IgM that can be detected in serum or cerebrospinal fluid. Antibodies are typically detectable 3-8 days after symptom onset and may persist for several months. Viral culture and molecular testing are available but are unreliable and negative results should not be used to rule out infection.

There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus (WNV) disease; clinical management is supportive. Antiemetic therapy and rehydration for nausea and vomiting as well as pain control for headaches may be needed for patients with neuroinvasive disease. Airway protection, monitoring for elevated intracranial pressures and seizures, and ventilatory support may be required.

As no vaccines are available for humans, prevention is focused on individual- and community-level mosquito control. Individuals are encouraged to wear long sleeves and pants, use EPA-approved mosquito repellents, and limit time outdoors at dawn and dusk when the mosquitoes that carry WNV are most active. Eliminating standing water on their property to reduce mosquito breeding sites as well as preventing mosquitoes from entering their homes by using air conditioning and window and door screens can also reduce risk of WNV infection.

Additional Resources:

[West Nile Virus | West Nile Virus | CDC](#)
[West Nile Virus \(nmhealth.org\)](#)

EPIDEMIOLOGY AND RESPONSE

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New Mexico Health Alert Network: To register for the NM Health Alert Network, please visit the following site <https://nm.readyop.com/fs/4cjZ/10b2> Please fill out the registration form completely and click Submit at the bottom of the page, to begin receiving Important health alerts, advisories, and updates.

Please Note that our system also utilizes text messaging to notify members of important health information. Due to FCC Regulation changes that are designed to decrease the amount of unwanted spam text messages sent each year to citizens, please save, this phone number **(855) 596-1810** as the “**New Mexico Health Alert Network**” default phone number for your account used for text messages on the mobile device(s) you register with us.