- Antibiotics or other specific medications are not effective against this infection, and no vaccines against this virus are approved for use in people or animals.

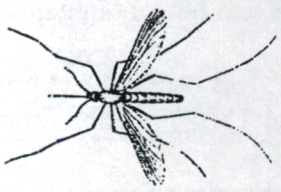
In mid August, 1999 wild crows were found dead at the Bronx Zoo in New Your City. About the same time, there were reports of encephalitis, originally thought to be due to St. Louis Encephalitis, a related arbovirus, in people in New Your City. By late August, dead crows were reported in many parts of downstate New York and Long Island. Deaths in captive birds began in the Bronx Zoo in early September and continued over a three-week period. Unusual mortalities of wild birds occurred into early November on Long Island, downstate New York, and adjacent New Jersey and Connecticut within an approximately 200 km radius of New York City. Horses with encephalitis began to die on Long Island in late August, and continued into October. West Nile Virus was isolated from affected crows and other wild birds, zoo birds, people, horses and mosquitoes.

West Nile Virus may have been introduced to the New York area by migratory birds, legal or illegal imports of birds, in a person incubating the virus, or by the transport of infected mosquitoes via aircraft.

The 1999 New York area outbreak caused disease in at least 60 people and resulted in 7 human deaths, including one Canadian from Toronto who had visited New York. It likely killed at least 5,000 wild birds, mainly American crows, but it also affected at least 17 other species of native wild (Blue Jay, Fish Crow, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Rock Dove, American Robin, Red-tailed Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Belted Kingfisher) and captive (Bald Eagle, Laughing Gull, Sandhill Crane, Black-crowned Night Heron, Mallard) birds, as well as Chilean Flamingos and unspecified pheasants and cormorants. Twenty-four horses were affected and at least 10 died or had to be killed humanely.

American health officials responded to the West Nile Virus outbreak with public education campaigns emphasizing reduction of mosquito habitat, mosquito avoidance and use of repellants; surveillance of mosquitoes, birds, people and horses for West Nile Virus infection; and mosquito control programs.

Canadian federal and provincial animal health and public health agencies are concerned that West Nile Virus may be brought to Canada this spring by migrating birds, since infected or incubating birds may remain asymptomatic. The situation is unprecedented, and it is impossible to evaluate accurately the probability of virus introduction. Canadian epidemiologists are monitoring the situation in the United States, where any West Nile Virus activity is expected to occur first. Surveillance for unusual mortalities in wild birds is an important part of the Canadian West Nile Virus response, which, in addition, may involve surveys for West Nile Virus infection in wild and domestic birds, and in mosquitoes, as well as in domestic animals, as the situation demands. The goal is to reduce the risk of human infection through public education and mosquito abatement if, where, and when the situation warrants such action.



If West Nile Virus becomes active in 2000, you can reduce your risk of exposure by becoming informed of localities where it is circulating. If possible, avoid such areas or minimize outdoor activities where mosquitoes are likely to be encountered, especially at dawn, at dusk and at night. Adopt personal protective measures, such as use of repellants, nets, etc., if exposure to mosquitoes cannot be avoided.

In addition, keep an eye out for warning signs that our wild birds, especially American Crows, may provide. Unusual outbreaks of bird mortality should be reported to Dr. Pierre-Yves Daoust ([902] 566-0667) or Dr. Scott McBurney ([902] 566-0959), CCWHC-Atlantic Region, at the Atlantic Veterinary College, Charlottetown, PEI, especially if neurologic disease is suspected. Dead birds can safely be picked up using rubber gloves or a leak proof plastic bag turned inside out. The plastic bag containing the