



# Oak Hammock Marsh and West Nile Virus

*Each year, thousands of people visit wetlands to relax, enjoy, and learn. Visitors of all types take part in the many activities at Oak Hammock Marsh. Teachers bring students to wetlands on field trips. Parents send their children to summer nature camps. Birders explore wetlands looking for key species. Local people walk their dogs along wetland trails. Is it possible to safely take part in these and other wetland activities despite the threat of West Nile virus? Oak Hammock Marsh has prepared this information sheet to address this question for parents, teachers, and other wetland-lovers.*

## Avoid Mosquito Bites

West Nile virus is spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. The best way to avoid getting the virus is to avoid being bitten. This does not mean that you need to avoid wetlands or outdoor activities altogether. You can take steps to protect yourself, your students or children, and your pets while you enjoy wetlands:

- **Protective clothing:** Long-sleeved shirts and long pants prevent mosquitoes from reaching your skin. The best items are light-coloured, loose fitting, and tightly woven.
- **Repellents:** Use mosquito repellents on exposed skin and clothing. Always follow product directions, especially with children. Carry repellent with you to re-apply if you are outside for a long time. If you forget to bring repellent on a guided program, please ask. Repellent is available upon request. Wash repellents off skin when returning indoors.
- **Planning:** Mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk. Unfortunately, these are some of the best times to see

wildlife in wetlands. If you choose to go out during these periods, please wear protective clothing and insect repellents. Avoid walking your pets at dawn and dusk.

- **Stay on the trails:** Mosquitoes rest in the grass and on other vegetation throughout the day. If you (or your dog) wander off of the trails, you will stir up the mosquitoes.

## Q: Are the mosquitoes that transmit West Nile virus found at Oak Hammock Marsh?

**A:** Several species of mosquito are known to carry and transmit the West Nile virus. One of the key types to carry the virus is *Culex* mosquitoes. These are found at Oak Hammock Marsh, but they prefer to lay their eggs in small stagnant pockets of water in man-made environments. Containers such as old tires, clogged rain gutters, and neglected rain barrels provide ideal habitats for *Culex* larvae.

## Q: Does Oak Hammock Marsh use larvicide or fogging to kill mosquitoes?

**A:** No, the marsh does not have a mosquito control program. Most visitors rarely encounter adult mosquitoes during the day. Oak Hammock Marsh is a large, deep wetland with lots of open water and wave action. This inhibits mosquito breeding. In addition, the marsh is home to many predators that feed on mosquitoes. Dragonflies, damselflies, frogs, fish, and birds eat the larvae and adult mosquitoes. However, if the virus becomes a human health risk at Oak Hammock Marsh, the province may decide to take action to control mosquito populations.





**Q: Do you have any special recommendations for Dusk-to-Dawn sleepovers?**

**A:** Shallow bodies of still water in the Willow Bluff and Oak Bluff produce more mosquitoes than deeper parts of the marsh. Groups staying overnight in the Clubhouse are more likely to encounter mosquitoes than daytime groups or groups sleeping in the main building. Children and their leaders should dress appropriately and wear proper repellents while outdoors. The screen doors should be tightly closed at all times.

**Q: If we find a dead bird during our visit, what should we do?**

**A:** Birds die for many reasons. Very few are likely to die from West Nile virus. Should you encounter a dead bird while visiting the marsh, do not handle it. Please report your sighting at the Interpretive Centre so that we can take the appropriate action.

## Mosquito Repellent

Repellents can help keep mosquitoes from biting. DEET-based repellents have been found to be effective. Always read and follow instructions carefully when using repellents. Health Canada recommends:

- *Children under 6 months* – DO NOT use repellents containing DEET.
- *Children aged 6 months - 2 years* – if the risk of insect bites is high, repellents with 10% DEET or less may be considered for use in small amounts. Use no more than once per day.
- *Children aged 2-12 years* – repellents with 10% DEET or less should be used no more than 3 times a day. Avoid the face and hands.
- *Adults/Children 12 years and older* – may use repellents with up to 30% DEET. One application of 30% DEET repellents should last about 6.5 hours.

- *Pregnant or nursing women* – there is no indication that women who use DEET products will harm their unborn or nursing children. Consider other options as well. Wear protective clothing, avoid peak mosquito periods, etc.

Although rare, pets can also get West Nile virus. Avoid using repellents with DEET on pets. Use only products that are approved for pets. If in doubt, consult a veterinarian.

## Risks Associated with West Nile Virus

- The chances of becoming infected by West Nile virus are extremely low.
- Those most at risk for the disease are people 50 years of age and older, and those with weakened immune systems.
- Most people who get the virus (about 80%) never display any symptoms. Some develop minor flu-like symptoms (about 20%). A very small number of people develop a serious illness (less than 1%).

For more information, please visit the following Web sites:

Ducks Unlimited Canada: [www.ducks.ca/westnile](http://www.ducks.ca/westnile)

Manitoba Health: [www.gov.mb.ca/health/wnv/factsheets.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/wnv/factsheets.html)

Or phone us at: (204) 467-3300

