

West Nile Virus: Wild Game Hunters

Q. Is there a risk of getting infected with West Nile virus (WNV) if I eat turkey or another animal that has been infected with the virus?

A. There is no evidence that people can become infected with WNV from eating infected meat. The small, theoretical risk of infection can be eliminated by proper handling and thorough cooking of meat before it is consumed.

Several well-known and potentially serious food-borne illnesses can occur when turkey and other meats are improperly handled or undercooked. For more information on food safety, please see:

<http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/>

Q. What is known about the risk of West Nile virus infection from dried, uncooked meat (jerky)?

A. There are no published studies that directly address this question. Most studies indicate that while mammals can become infected with West Nile virus, they do not develop high concentrations of virus in their blood or tissues. Although it is unlikely that dried meat from mammals would have much virus present, and probable that gastrointestinal digestion would further limit the possibility of infectiousness, there is insufficient evidence to determine whether dried meat presents a risk of West Nile virus infection to humans or other animals.

If you have questions about this topic it may be advisable to contact local wildlife authorities and/or health authorities to find out whether the area where the animal was harvested has West Nile virus activity, and whether animals of the species in question were affected.

Q. Are duck and other wild game hunters at risk for West Nile virus infection?

A. Because of their outdoor exposure, game hunters may be at risk if they are bitten by mosquitoes in areas with West Nile virus activity. The extent to which West Nile virus may be present in wild game is unknown.

Q. What should wild game hunters do to protect against West Nile virus infection?

A. Hunters should follow the usual precautions when handling wild animals. If they anticipate being exposed to mosquitoes, they should apply insect repellent to clothing and skin, according to label instructions, to prevent mosquito bites. Hunters should wear gloves when handling and cleaning animals to prevent blood exposure to bare hands and meat should be cooked thoroughly.

Q. Who should wild game hunters contact for information about the risk for West Nile virus infection in specific geographic areas?

A. Hunters should check with their local area department of wildlife and naturalist resources, state epidemiologist at the state health department, or the US Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center, Madison, WI, 608-270-2400 for information on local area risk.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/westnile, or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (Español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY)

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