

West Nile Virus (WNV) and the Blood Supply

It has been determined that it is possible to transmit WNV from an infected blood donor to a transfusion recipient. The New York Blood Center (NYBC) is following the FDA recommendations to prevent the possible transmission of West Nile Virus by transfusion.

Can you get West Nile Virus from being a blood donor?

No. It is not possible for a person to get West Nile Virus or any infectious disease from giving blood.

How do you get West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus is transmitted to humans from a bite from an infected mosquito.

How do you know if you have West Nile Virus?

The vast majority of people with West Nile Virus have either no symptoms or mild flu like symptoms (such as fever with headache, nausea and vomiting). However, in less than 1% of people who are infected, there can be severe neurological symptoms of meningitis and encephalitis. These severe complications from West Nile Virus have occurred mostly in elderly persons, but might also occur in persons with weak immune symptoms.

How will the NYBC protect the blood supply from West Nile Virus?

We are being especially attentive to donors who have headache and an elevated fever within 7 days prior to coming to donate or a history of current symptoms suggesting a viral infectious disease (flu-like symptoms, nausea). It is, and has always been, our practice not to allow people with these symptoms to donate blood or any blood component.

We are also involved in testing the entire blood supply for WNV under a research protocol. The tests being used are in use throughout the country. Donors who test positive will be notified.

Should someone who needs a blood transfusion be concerned?

A person who has been infected with West Nile Virus carries the infection in their body for approximately one week. There is no chronic carrier state such as occurs with HIV or hepatitis C virus. Also, during this short time the donor may feel ill and would be deferred from donating blood. Therefore, the chances of West Nile Virus being transmitted by a blood transfusion are very small. When a blood transfusion is medically indicated, the benefits far outweigh the risks.

If you have any concerns or questions about West Nile Virus, please feel free to call us at 1-800-688-0900.