



# The Spinal Column

## Understanding The West Nile Virus: What is the Real Danger?

By Dr. Rupi Mitha, B.Sc., N.D.



Now that the heat and humidity of the summer is upon us, we have to deal with the one insect species that is a real pain; the mosquito. However, this year is different than most. West Nile Virus has splashed itself all over the news, papers, health clinics and upon the lips of your average outdoor lover. What we need to ask ourselves though is do we need to be as cautious as we are told to be by the government? First let's understand the disease and how it is transmitted.

The virus itself (known as a Flavivirus) is transmitted only by the females. In the process of a mosquito feeding, the insect injects enzymes which are meant to prevent your blood from clotting so that they can obtain a good blood meal. When the enzymes are injected in, so is the virus. For some who contract the virus, mild cold/flu symptoms may result. However for the those that are elderly or very ill are at a higher risk to developing possible serious consequences (approx. 1%). In 2002, 100 people were said to be infected with WNV in the Region of Peel. How severe these cases are unknown. The incubation period of the virus is 3-15 days in length and then and only then will symptoms, if any, appear.

Within the Region of Peel, there is a larvicidal application program occurring in a variety of places. The larvicidals used are methoprene and Bti (a bacteria). Both of these substances inhibit the larvae of the mosquito into becoming

full grown adults. Both of which are said to be inert and does not effect humans but do indeed effect other elements of our natural ecosystem including dragonflies and some species of fish. The Region is presently distributing the Larvicides every 30 days throughout Mississauga and Brampton.

The government has advised us to personally protect ourselves with Insect repellants which contain a substance called DEET. This agent has been in use for over 60 years and was primarily Korea and Vietnam in the 60's and 70's. The chemical itself was never put through strict laboratory trials since the agency that now governs its use was only created later in the 70's and by then, DEET had been in wide use for over 20-30 years, so the chemical was "grandfathered" in. Since then, DEET has been the primary insecticide used in the prevention of mosquito bites for Adults.

Up until 2 years ago, DEET was strongly not encouraged to be used on children. Now a percentage of up to 10% DEET has become acceptable. Some formulations for adults contain as much as 70% DEET. Even the U.S. army will not use anything above 35%! Many people will complain of headaches, rashes, sores, dizziness and even seizures while using the chemical. Absorption of DEET increases in hot weather, so be wary of when you are applying this repellant. Despite these documented cases, DEET is continually being endorsed by the manufacturers of insect repellant. One has to wonder though, what longterm effects can occur from applying a chemical which is meant to inhibit proper functioning of an organic being like a mosquito; on ourselves; also organic beings?

### Did You Know?

- DEET was never tested by the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Birds that are used as a gauge for the spread of West Nile Virus also happen to die in the most polluted areas of our country.
- Heavy breathers tend to attract more mosquitoes than light breathers.
- Eating a "junk-food" diet will increase carbon dioxide production in your body, thereby attracting more mosquitoes.

## As an Aside:

Many parents are reluctant to give herbs to their children. Common herbs are safely given to children for a variety of reasons such as illness or as a treat. Herbs can be used in tea form, as a cream, in a steam bath, as a poultice, in oil form or ingested as food. Some common herbs that children don't mind taking: Peppermint, Chamomile, Raspberry Leaf, Basil, Calendula, Fennel, Jasmine, Geranium, Ginger, Lavender and Licorice (that's the black kind, not the red!!).

Here's an easy Herbal Iced Tea/Lemonade Recipe that can also be made into popsicles for your kids. Sugar can be easily substituted with either honey or Stevia (an herb which is 100X sweeter than sugar; available at most health food stores):

## Lavender Lemonade

5 cups water  
1 1/2 cups sugar (or stevia to taste)  
12 stems fresh lavender  
2 1/4 cups lemon juice

Boil 2 1/2 cups of water with the sugar. Add the lavender stems and remove from heat. Place on the lid and let cool. When cool, add 2 1/2 cups water and the lemon juice. Strain out the lavender. Serve the lavender lemonade with crushed ice and garnish with lavender blossoms.

Serves 8. Refreshing!

## About the Author:



Rupri Mitha N.D., Owner and Naturopathic Doctor of the Brampton Naturopathic Clinic, offers residents of Brampton the choice of reliable, educated holistic health care.

Having completed her education at The Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine (the only accredited Naturopathic Institution in Canada) and subsequently receiving her license, she offers her patients a variety of healing modalities. Methods of treatment include Nutrition, Diet and Lifestyle Counselling, Herbal Medicine, Homeopathy, Acupuncture and Hydrotherapy.

Naturopathic Medicine is covered by most extended health benefit programs.

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