

Understanding West Nile and Lyme disease

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Transcript

[0:00 Introduction]

Dr. Mark Loeb: Every summer, we hear more and more about diseases like Lyme and West Nile. But what exactly are these diseases, and how exactly do they affect you? I'm Mark Loeb, an infectious disease specialist and professor in the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine at McMaster University.

[Understanding Lyme disease 0:16]

Dr. Mark Loeb: Did you know that the ticks that cause Lyme disease can now be found almost anywhere in Ontario? You can get Lyme disease after being bitten by an infected blacklegged tick. The tick has to be attached to your skin for at least 24 hours to transmit the bacteria that causes Lyme disease. Most cases in Ontario occur in June to August. You might feel like you just caught the flu with symptoms like fever, headache, muscle aches, along with an enlarging rash. Left untreated, there can be serious complications, including inflammation of the heart, meningitis, arthritis, and nerve damage. The best way to prevent getting Lyme disease is to avoid bites by using insect repellent, wearing proper clothing, and removing ticks as soon as possible after bites. We're currently doing a study on Lyme disease to better understand what happens to the immune system in people with Lyme disease, and we hope this will help inform efforts to develop a vaccine.

[Understanding West Nile virus 1:08]

Did you know that you can become seriously ill after being bitten by a mosquito in Ontario? That's because you can become infected with the West Nile virus that can be carried by mosquitoes. West Nile is spread through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes get infected with the virus when they bite infected birds. Most people who get infected won't develop any symptoms, but about 20 percent will have a flu-like syndrome, and about 1 in 50 will get serious symptoms, including meningitis, encephalitis, or paralysis. People who are middle-aged or older are at highest risk, along with people with weakened immune systems. Prevention includes mosquito repellent, wearing long sleeves and pants when you will be exposed to mosquitoes, and getting rid of standing water that allows mosquito breeding sites around your home.

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