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## Ministry urges taking preventive measures against West Nile virus

By JUDY SIEGEL-ITZKOVICH  
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Disease arrived with summer, but all cases have been mild so far.

Since the beginning of the hot weather, two Israelis have been diagnosed and 13 are suspected of having contracted West Nile fever, according to the Health Ministry, which noted that none was seriously ill and all have recovered.

Last year, there were 71 reported cases, and two people died of the disease, which is spread by mosquitoes that get the virus from migratory birds. This season, the patients were located in 12 places from Haifa and Afula in the North to Ashkelon in the South. There have been six patients in the Dan Region so far.

West Nile virus is an arbovirus carried by mosquitoes that bite infected migrating birds and other animals. The resulting disease is mild in the vast majority of cases, but there have been serious outbreaks that killed in various parts of the world, including Israel. Symptoms may include fever, headaches, fatigue, muscle pain or aches, malaise, nausea, anorexia, vomiting and rash.

Symptoms usually appear a week to 14 days after infection.

There is no specific treatment.

Less than 1 percent of the cases are severe and result in neurological disease when the central nervous system is affected. The elderly, very young, chronically ill and others with weak immune systems are more liable to be harmed.

The ministry recommends that, to avoid mosquito bites, staying away from or preventing the formation of standing water, even in a pail. Wear long-sleeved, light clothing and apply mosquito repellent, especially during the afternoon and early-evening hours when the parasites tend to bite. Install window screens if possible.

Meanwhile, new research at the University of Haifa has shown that when a health danger is close to home, medical personnel base their views about vaccinations on personal experience and feelings and less on scientific and analytical know-how.

When the danger is far away, such as with the Ebola virus threat in Western Africa, "it's easier for medical people to maintain a professional viewpoint," according Dr.

Anat Gesser-Aldesburg of the university's School of Public Health. She conducted the study with the school's dean, Prof. Manfred Green, and Natan Walter.

The World Health Organization has already declared Ebola fever to be an emergency, even though it threatens mostly West Africa. As there is no treatment and the majority of victims die within a few weeks, efforts to prevent infection are being carried out.

In recent years, the Health Ministry has called on the public to get booster vaccinations against polio for their children, but because there has been no outbreak of polio in Israel, many have declined to take their children even for an oral vaccination.

Writing in the American Journal of Infection Control, the University of Haifa researchers queried 240 doctors, nurses and laymen to examine their positions.

When the threat was considered distant or very small, more health workers than laymen supported the vaccination program. But when the threat was near, there were no longer any gaps between the medical professionals and the general public, and the doctors and nurses advocated vaccination and based their views less on rationality and more on personal experience and feelings.



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