



Weekly Epidemiological Report for West Nile Virus infection, Greece, 2019 - 08 August 2019 -

This weekly epidemiological report aims to present an overview of the epidemiological data on West Nile Virus (WNV) human infection, the reported cases and the public health response to WNV in Greece for transmission period 2019.

Data presented in this report are derived from the notifications of laboratory diagnosed human cases of WNV infection sent to the National Public Health Organization (NPHO) by the treating physicians and from the daily communication with diagnostic laboratories: i) the National Reference Centre for Arboviruses, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, ii) the Department of Microbiology, School of Medicine, University of Athens, iii) the Hellenic Pasteur Institute, iv) the Laboratory of Clinical Virology, School of Medicine, University of Crete. The Department of Epidemiological Surveillance and Intervention of the NPHO undertakes a verification procedure through communication with the treating physicians and the patients, as necessary.

In 2019 period, up to 08/08/2019 (14.00p.m.), thirty five (35) laboratory diagnosed cases of WNV infection have been reported to NPHO, twenty one (21) of which presented with neuro-invasive disease (WNND, encephalitis and/or meningitis and/or acute flaccid paralysis) and fourteen (14) cases with mild symptoms (febrile syndrome) ([Table 1](#)). Four deaths were recorded, concerning patients older than 80 years of age.

Table 1. Number of reported cases of WNV disease, Greece, period 2019, up to 08/08/2019

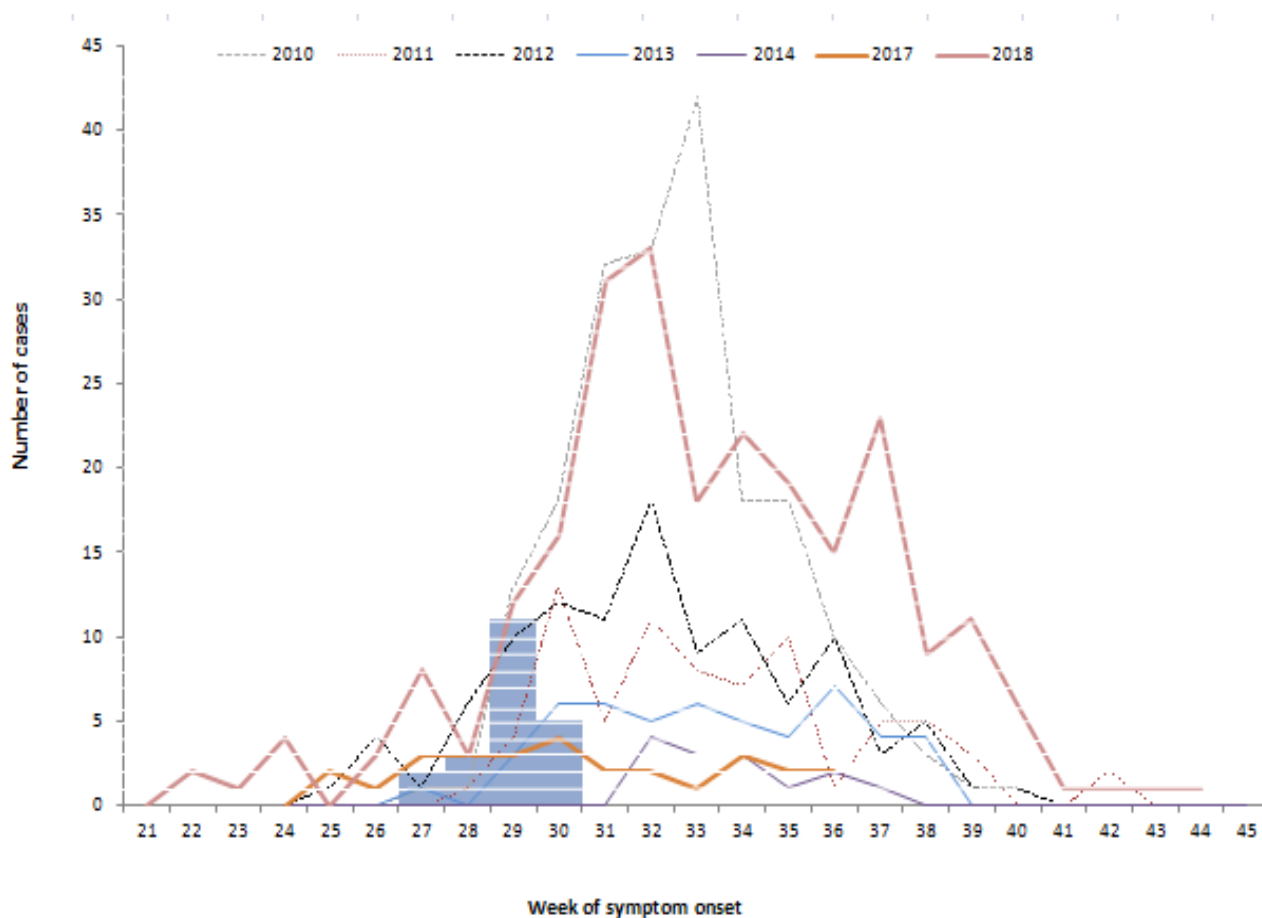
	Number of cases with central nervous system (CNS) manifestations ^[1]	Number of cases without CNS manifestations	Total number of cases	Number of deaths ^[2]
Number of WNV cases and deaths	21	14	35	4

1. Refers mainly to encephalitis, aseptic meningitis and meningoencephalitis cases
2. The number of deaths is included in the total number of cases

For the first diagnosed case of WNV infection for transmission period 2019 (case without WNND), the reported onset of symptoms was on 21st June 2019 (wk 25/2019). [Figure 1](#) shows the reported WNND cases by week of symptom onset.

The median age of WNND cases is 77 years (52 - 91 years).

Figure 1. Number of laboratory diagnosed WNND cases by week of symptom onset, Greece, 2010-2019 (until 08/08/2019).



* Each blue box represents one laboratory diagnosed case of WNND reported to NPHO in transmission period 2019.

[Table 2](#) show the geographic distribution of the notified cases with laboratory diagnosed WNV disease at the level of suspected Municipalities of exposure. The patient's suspected place of exposure is a rough indicator of the area of WNV circulation.

According to a serosurvey conducted in 2010 by the HCDCP and the National School of Public Health, at the epicentre of the 2010 WNV outbreak in Central Macedonia, it was estimated that WNND disease develops in 1:140 infected persons.

Table 2. Reported cases with laboratory diagnosed WNV disease (with and without WNND) by suspected Municipality of exposure, Greece, transmission period 2019, up to 08/08/2019

Regional Unit	Suspected Municipality of exposure	Number of cases with WNND	Incidence of WNND per 100,000 population ^[1]	Number of West Nile Fever cases (non WNND)
Pieria	Katerini	1	1.2	0
Pella	Pella	1	1.6	0

Xanthi	Topeiros	1	8.7	3
	Avdira	1	5.3	2
	Xanthi	1	1.5	1
Kavala	Nestos	3	13.4	4
	Thasos ²	0	0	1
Larisa	Larisa	3	1.8	3
	Tirnavos	2	8.0	0
	Kileler	1	4.8	0
Karditsa	Sofades	1	5.3	0
East Attica	Spata-Artemida	3	8.9	0
	Markopoulos-Mesogaia	3	15.0	0
Total Greece		21	0.19	14

1. Calculations based on 2011 census data (Hellenic Statistical Authority).

2. Based on the currently available collected data, the Working Group for the Designation of Affected Areas considered that this Municipality is a probable place of exposure of the patient, whereas the probability of exposure to other areas cannot be excluded, based on the travel history. The designation of this Municipality as the suspected place of exposure aimed to the implementation of prevention measures, with the rationale of the most safe choice.

PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES SUPPORTED BY THE NPHO, 2019

In every mosquito circulation season, the National Public Health Organization -in collaboration with other involved stakeholders- implements a series of preventive and response public health measures for the management of West Nile Virus infection, which include:

I. Enhanced surveillance for WNV disease in humans:

- **Awareness raising of physicians** about the WNV infection: Testing for West Nile virus infection in suspected cases (such as cases with encephalitis, aseptic meningitis, acute flaccid paralysis, fever of undetermined etiology) is recommended. The NPHO provides guidelines for the recognition and diagnosis of WNV disease and the recommended laboratory investigation (mailings and website www.eody.gov.gr). For the 2019 period, an informative letter was sent to all Health Units and Medical Associations of the country for vigilance regarding West Nile Virus, in mid May 2019. In addition, following the recording of cases in an area, local Health Units are urgently informed.
- **Daily communication and information exchange with laboratories** conducting diagnostic testing for WNV.
- **Enhancing laboratory diagnosis** of suspected cases, by supporting specialised diagnostic laboratories.
- **Case investigation:** The Vector-borne Diseases Office of NPHO undertakes the investigation of every reported WNV case within 24 hours after diagnosis, in order to determine the suspected place of exposure, the risk factors and the severity of the disease.

- **Immediate update of stakeholders** on the diagnosed cases (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Rural Development and Food, Hellenic National Blood Transfusion Center, Regions/ Directorate of Public Health and Social Welfare, Municipalities).
- II. **Communication and health promotion activities for the public:** Educational material for the public regarding West Nile Virus infection and the recommended protective measures against mosquito bites is available in the NPHOs website. In 2019, NPHO:
- Published two Press Releases (in mid May 2019 regarding the recommended prevention measures, and on 19th June 2019 with clarifications on the virus circulation in the country).
 - Updated the information leaflet “Protect yourselves from mosquitoes” (in Greek and English).
 - Produced informative leaflet “West Nile Virus: Learn and protect” (in Greek).
 - Distributed electronically the TV spot “Protect yourselves from mosquitoes” in national and local channels since April 2019.
 - Sent via email the new informative material (leaflets and TV spot) to local authorities, in mid May 2019.
- III. **Coordination of an intersectional Working Group (WG) on the definition of affected areas by vector borne diseases.** This WG, under the MoH Committee for the Prevention and Management of Tropical Diseases, considers all available entomological and epidemiological data and decides on the characterization of affected areas assisting the implementation of blood safety measures. The list of affected areas is published on NPHOs website and updated regularly. These are used by the Hellenic National Blood Transfusion Center to issue guidance on blood safety. In addition, the Coordinating Haemovigilance Centre of NPHO issue guidance for the haemovigilance competent authorities.
- IV. Collaboration and exchange of information with the **Ministry of Rural Development and Food** regarding the West Nile virus infection in equids.
- V. **Vector surveillance and control activities:**
- **Raising awareness and guidance to Regional Authorities:** NPHO communicates regularly (workshops, meetings, letters) with all Regional Authorities in Greece recommending the timely planning, organization and implementation of integrated vector control programmes. In 2019, NPHO sent relevant awareness letters in January 2019 (with a brief guide to the key steps to achieve timely implementation of the vector control program) and urgently informs local authorities of the affected areas regarding the recommended preventive and response measures (intensified mosquito control and raising awareness of the local population). In addition, following the initiative of the General Secretary of Public Health of the Ministry of Health, NPHO organised, in cooperation with the Benaki Phytopathological Institute, in May 2019, workshops with all regional public health authorities, regarding the preventive actions for mosquito-borne diseases and especially the vector control programmes.
 - **Entomological surveillance:** NPHO, in collaboration with the Department of Parasitology, Entomology and Tropical Diseases of the National School of Public Health (NSPH), the Benaki Phytopathological Institute, the MALWEST project (2012-2014), Universities, Regions, local authorities and subcontractors of the local mosquito control programmes has implemented, participated or coordinated -from 2010 to 2014- active vector surveillance programme. For the 2019 period, NPHO organizes an active vector surveillance programme to be performed in various areas of the country and continues the effort to collect entomological data.

- **Communication with international public health stakeholders:** Frequent communication and weekly information exchange with ECDC (real-time reporting of the diagnosed cases in TESSy).

CONCLUSIONS

In 2010-2014 and 2017-2018, cases of West Nile virus infection were recorded in humans in various areas of Greece, while virus circulation was recorded in almost all regions. The recurrence of WNV infection cases was considered likely and expected in the country, as well as in other European countries (as in each season).

In 2019, up to 08/08/2019, thirty-five human cases of WNV infection have been recorded in Greece, in the Regional Units (RU, NUTS3 level) of Pella, Pieria, Xanthi, Kavala, Larisa, Karditsa and East Attica. It is expected that more cases will be diagnosed in the immediate future, especially following the heightened awareness of health professionals.

In the EU Member States and neighboring countries, in transmission period 2019, up to 01/08/2019, human WNV infection cases have been recorded in Greece, Hungary, France and Romania (source: ECDC, [Weekly updates: 2019 West Nile virus transmission season](#)).

Epidemiological surveillance of the disease, systematic and early implementation of mosquito control programs and personal protective measures against mosquito bites are considered the most appropriate measures to control WNV infection outbreaks.

Since the circulation of WNV and its geographical distribution (i.e., the areas with recording of human cases) during each period cannot be predicted, personal protective measures against mosquitoes are encouraged, during the period of mosquito activity.

National public health authorities have taken timely preventive measures, including communication activities regarding the recommendation for personal protection measures against mosquito bites. General information regarding personal protection measures against mosquitoes is available at: https://eody.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/mosquito_brochure_2019.pdf

In addition, weekly surveillance reports are published on NPHO website <https://eody.gov.gr/en/disease/west-nile-virus/>, which include updated information.