It’s important for parents to recognize that there are simple steps they can take to help protect their children from exposure to the West Nile Virus. Below, Dr. Kay Kim answers one parent’s questions about how to minimize her child’s chances of being exposed to this infection. Dr. Kim is Board Certified in Pediatric Medicine and is a partner in Community Care Physicians Latham Pediatrics Group located in the Capital Region Health Park in Latham, NY. (518-783-3110). Dr. Kim is accepting new patients into her practice and has been providing healthcare services for the children of the Capital District for over twenty years.

**QUESTION:** We've heard so much on the news about the West Nile Virus; I know that it can cause serious infection. I want my children to be able to play outside during the nice weather, please tell me what I can do to protect them.

**ANSWER:** Many parents are concerned about the West Nile Virus and want to do what they can to minimize the chances that their family may become infected. In New York our State Health Department is working with other state and local agencies and groups to address the return of the West Nile virus in New York. The Centers for Disease Control confirms that most people who do become infected with the West Nile virus will have either no symptoms or only mild symptoms such as a slight fever and/or headache. Healthy children and adults are at low risk for serious infection, although the risk increases for people over the age of 50. Serious infections will begin with a rapid onset of high fever, tremors, body aches, disorientation and even convulsions. On rare occasions, West Nile virus infection can result in a severe and sometimes fatal illness known as West Nile encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain).

The West Nile virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. People, birds, dogs, cats, horses and some other animals are vulnerable. There is no documented evidence to show that the virus can cause serious illness in dogs or cats or that it can be spread from person to person or from animal to person. Only mosquitoes can infect a person or animal with the West Nile virus, therefore, steps to prevent the spread of the virus are aimed at reducing exposure to mosquitoes.

There are some relatively simple steps you can take to help protect your family. Make sure that your windows and doors have screens that are in good condition to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home. Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water. Limit the number of places around your home where standing water may develop such as in empty flower pots, buckets or even discarded tires. The New York State Health Department recommends that you drill holes in the bottoms of outdoor recycling containers, keep roof gutters clean of debris, change the water in bird baths, drain water from pool covers, clean and chlorinate swimming pools and turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when they are not being used.
The peak mosquito feeding hours are from dusk until dawn although some mosquitoes do feed throughout the day. Repellents can be effective at reducing bites from mosquitoes but it is important to recognize that there are potential health risks to using repellents, especially if they are not applied properly. When you consider using a mosquito repellent, consider when and how long you will be outside and how much exposure you will actually have.

Apply insect repellent containing DEET when you're outdoors. Make sure you carefully read and follow the directions given on any insect repellent product before use. Avoid applying repellent to children who are younger than 2 years old. Use care in applying repellent to small children, and don't put repellent on their hands because it may get into their mouth or eyes and cause irritation. If West Nile virus is found in your area dress your child in a long sleeved shirt, long pants, shoes and socks when they will be outdoors for an extended period of time. For further information about pesticides and mosquito repellants contact the National Pesticide Information Center: at 1-800-858-7378.