

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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West Nile Virus Here to Stay But Severity of Upcoming Season Unknown

Michigan will be faced with the threat of West Nile Virus for the fifth year in 2005. Although the past two seasons were mild in Washtenaw County, birds and horses were infected so we know the virus was circulating. Washtenaw County Public Health encourages citizens to continue efforts to prevent and limit West Nile virus transmission in our community. Washtenaw County has a comprehensive plan to address West Nile Virus. The plan includes surveillance of human disease, dead birds, and sick horses; encouraging municipalities to reduce mosquito breeding sites; educational efforts within the health care community; and health alerts to local residents regarding risk reduction behaviors and other prevention activities.

“We shouldn’t be fooled into thinking that West Nile virus has marched across the country, only to disappear into the Pacific” asserts Dr. Stan Reedy, Medical Director of Washtenaw County Public Health. “The virus has established itself in Washtenaw County and the level of virus in mosquitoes and birds will again build as summer goes on. The only thing that is uncertain is just how intense the hazard will be this year. This means we should all make prevention of mosquito bites a routine part of our summertime activity.”

Dead bird surveillance. The presence of dead crows, blue jays and ravens is a sensitive indicator for West Nile virus activity. Citizens should call Washtenaw County’s local hotline at (734) 544-6750 to report sightings and request testing of dead birds. Dead crows, blue jays and ravens will be tested by zip code. Once a zip code has a test-positive bird, birds will no longer be accepted for testing from that zip code. All reported dead birds will be counted and mapped to predict the level of virus activity in a particular geographic area.

Once a dead bird has been reported, safely dispose of the bird. Always avoid barehanded contact when handling any dead bird. Use disposable gloves to put the dead bird in a double plastic bag. If gloves are not available, invert a plastic shopping bag, scoop up the bird with the bag, tie off the bag and place the bagged carcass in an outdoor garbage container for disposal. One may also use a shovel to pick up the bird and bury it in a location where pets and other animals will not come into contact with the carcass.

Mosquito control. The Washtenaw County West Nile Task Force again recommends that local units of government institute a mosquito abatement program that emphasizes public education and source reduction. It is important to reduce mosquito breeding sites such as

drains, tires and discarded containers. Consultation is available for individuals and communities on source reduction and other methods to reduce exposure to the virus. Some local communities have applied, or are in the process of applying larvicides to catch basins within their jurisdiction. The number for Environmental Health is: **(734) 222-3869**

Personal protection. West Nile virus is spread to humans almost exclusively through the bite of an infected mosquito. There will continue to be a strong focus on educating the public on the many ways to reduce the risk of becoming infected by minimizing exposure to mosquitoes.

Actions include:

- Avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are most active (dawn & dusk).
- Wear light colored clothing, long-sleeved shirts & long pants, if possible.
- Apply insect repellent that contains the active ingredient DEET to exposed skin or clothing, always following the manufacturer's directions for use.
- Avoid applying DEET repellent to children less than 2 months of age.
- Avoid applying repellent to the hands of young children who may then transfer repellent to their eyes and mouth, which has the potential of causing irritation or adverse health effects.
- Take care when opening doors that mosquitoes don't "hitch a ride" into the house on you, your children, or your pets.
- Maintain window and door screens to help keep mosquitoes out of homes and other buildings.
- Empty standing water from buckets, flowerpots & saucers, pool & patio furniture covers and other similar sites where mosquitoes can lay eggs.
- Change water in pet bowls, bird baths, and horse troughs 2 to 3 times per week.
- Clean out gutters and clear low lying areas in your yard of wet, organic material.
- Keep tall weeds trimmed back from areas where you, or your children, spend time outdoors.

More information on West Nile virus is available on the county, state and national websites:

www.ewashtenaw.org

www.michigan.gov/westnilevirus

www.cdc.gov

