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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT BEGINS SURVEILLANCE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS

Public Urged to Prevent Mosquito Bites and Use West Nile Virus Hotline to Report Dead Crows, Ravens or Blue Jays

YPSILANTI, Mich., May 14, 2008—Washtenaw County Public Health Department officials today announced they have begun surveillance activities for the seasonal West Nile virus, a mosquito-borne virus that can cause mild-to-severe illness in humans and other animals. County residents are urged to take precautions to prevent mosquito bites and to call the **Washtenaw County West Nile Virus Hotline** at **(734) 544-6750** to report dead birds or to receive general West Nile virus information.

Although there have been no confirmed cases of West Nile virus in the county to date, mosquitoes emerging from winter hibernation may be infected with the virus and pose a health risk to the general public. Hot, dry weather conditions are favorable for amplifying the virus cycle in birds and mosquitoes, particularly in urban and suburban areas. In Michigan, August and September are the months of greatest risk to humans for becoming infected with the West Nile virus.

“While we have not traditionally experienced a large number of human cases of West Nile in Washtenaw County, it’s important for communities to be vigilant for signs of active transmission of the virus and to be prepared in the event of an outbreak” said Dr. Diana Torres-Burgos, Washtenaw County Medical Director. “Individuals can help us protect the public’s health by reporting dead birds in their area, taking precautions to prevent mosquito bites, and supporting community-based mosquito control programs.”

Mosquitoes become infected with West Nile virus when they feed on infected birds that carry the virus in their blood. People are primarily exposed to West Nile from the bite of a mosquito that is infected with the virus. The presence of dead crows, blue jays, and ravens is a sensitive indicator for the presence of the West Nile virus.

Nationally, cases of West Nile virus decreased in 2007, with 3,623 human cases and 124 deaths. Michigan accounted for 16 human cases, with 4 deaths. Washtenaw County had no human cases. As in 2006, most of the human cases in Michigan occurred in the southeastern part of the state.

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Communicable Disease

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Administration

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Public Health

HEARING IMPAIRED: (734) 994-1733

WEB ADDRESSES: <http://www.ewashtenaw.org>

<http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org>



Most people infected with West Nile virus do not have any symptoms of illness, but one in four will become ill 3-15 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. In a few cases, mostly among persons 75 years and older, death may occur. Mild illness from West Nile can include these symptoms: Slight fever, headache, body aches, and sometimes a skin rash and swollen glands. Serious illness from West Nile can include these symptoms: High fever, severe headache, stiff neck, mental confusion, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis. Recent research on West Nile survivors in Texas suggests that over 40% of people with severe disease never fully recover.

Dead Bird Surveillance

The Washtenaw County Public Health Department asks citizens to report all dead birds to the Washtenaw County West Nile Virus Hotline at (734) 544-6750. If a crow, raven, or blue jay has been dead for less than 48 hours and/or shows no signs of advanced decomposition, it may be collected for testing. Once a zip code has produced a positive test result, no more birds will be accepted from that zip code. Residents, however, should continue to report any dead birds they see. Dead bird reports are entered into a mapping database to predict the level of virus activity in a particular geographic area.

Personal Protection and Prevention

Since West Nile virus is spread to humans almost exclusively through the bite of an infected mosquito, it is important for individuals to prevent mosquito bites through the following prevention activities:

- Avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are most active (dawn and dusk).
- Wear light colored clothing, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants, if possible.
- Apply insect repellent that contains the active ingredient DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus to exposed skin or clothing. Always following the manufacturer's directions for use. DEET repellent can be used on children 2 months of age and older.
- Avoid applying repellent to the hands of young children who may then transfer the repellent to their eyes and mouth, which has the potential of producing irritation or adverse health effects.
- Take care when opening doors so that mosquitoes don't "hitch a ride" into the house on you, your children, or your pets.
- Maintain window and door screening to help keep mosquitoes out of homes and other buildings.
- Empty standing water from buckets, flowerpots, saucers, pools, patio furniture covers, and other similar sites where mosquitoes can lay eggs.
- Remove wet, organic material from your gutters and from low-lying areas in your yard.
- Keep tall weeds trimmed back from areas where you or your children spend time outdoors.

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

- westnile.ewashtenaw.org
- www.michigan.gov/westnilevirus
- www.cdc.gov

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