

Questions and Answers Regarding the West Nile Virus

Q. What is the West Nile Virus and where does the disease come from?

A: The West Nile virus is a disease spread by mosquitoes and has been in the United States since 1999. At least 40 states have reported cases of the disease. The disease is spread when a mosquito infected with West Nile, bites a bird and transfers the virus. Other mosquitoes then bite the same bird and become infected. When the same mosquitoes bite humans the disease is spread to people.

Q. How can I tell if I have West Nile virus?

A. The majority of people who get bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus will never develop health problems. But a few people do get sick and may experience symptoms similar to the flu. They may have a high fever or headaches, body aches, get tired easily, or even display a skin rash. Elderly people and those who already exhibit certain health problems are more likely to get sick rather than young healthy people. In extreme cases an individual may die as a result of the disease.

Q. What do I do if I see a dead Crow or Blue Jay?

A. Do not pick up the bird with your bare hand or even touch it. Instead please report the sighting to the Redford Township Department of Public Works at (313) 387-2690 or online to the State of Michigan at www.michigan.gov/westnilevirus . The local health department will be taking one specimen from each zip code area. If the sample bird has already been presented to the local health department for testing other birds may be disposed of in the following manner. Using a double garbage bag, turned inside out, put the plastic over your hand, pick up the bird and pull the bag back to its normal position. This will allow you to dispose of the bird without physically touching it. Place the bird in a secure place (where animals can not get to it) until being place at curbside on your normal disposal day. It is estimated West Nile virus killed more than 10,000 birds in the State of Michigan last year.

Q. How can I protect myself and my loved ones from getting the West Nile virus.

A. The first step is to physically protect yourself by dressing properly. This means wearing long sleeve shirts, long pants, and socks. It is also advisable to use a mosquito repellent. Products that contain DEET are advisable. However you may have to review the advisory label on the container to determine who should and should not use these products. Apply the product to vulnerable areas such as ears, forehead, and the neck. Be careful not to get the repellent in the eyes or the

mouth. You may wish to consult your physician regarding the most effective mosquito repellent for you to use. It will be important for you to check the longevity of the repellent to see when additional applications are needed. Also, some repellents are not water proof so if you go swimming you may need to reapply the repellent upon exiting the water.

Other things families can do to make our neighborhood less friendly to mosquitoes is to eliminate all areas of standing water where the mosquitoes lay their eggs. Dump out water in toys, flower pots, tires, buckets, tarps and/or pool covers. If you have a birdbath or outdoor pet water dishes, make sure to change the water every day.

Gutters clogged with leaves and debris can hold water which could breed mosquitoes. Make sure all the window and door screens in your house are repaired and fit tightly in the frames.

Larvicides may also be purchased to treat areas of standing water.

Q. Can my dogs or cats get the West Nile virus?

A. Except in rare cases, dogs do not get the virus, and cats get only mild cases. Neither animal can transfer the disease to humans.

Q. Where can I find out more information regarding the West Nile virus?

A. There are a number of internet web sites which contain large amounts of information regarding West Nile virus.

The federal Center for Disease Control www.cdc.gov
Select "in the news" and "West Nile virus"

The State of Michigan www.michigan.gov/westnilevirus
or call 888-668-0869 anytime for a recorded message.