
State Activates Dead Bird Reporting Hotline to Track West Nile Virus

State health officials announce they have reactivated the statewide, toll-free **Dead Bird Reporting Hotline at 1-800-433-1610**. Hotline staff can answer questions about dead birds and provide information on safe handling and disposal. The bird may also be tested for West Nile virus.

“People should not use their bare hands to handle dead birds, which act as an early warning system for West Nile virus,” said Carol Quest, Health Officer for the Watertown Department of Public. “While very few mosquitoes actually carry the virus, finding West Nile virus in dead birds indicates it may be present in the local mosquito population and that people should take precautions to avoid mosquito bites.”

West Nile virus (WNV) is an infection that can occur in warm weather months when mosquitoes are active. The virus is spread to people primarily by the bite of a mosquito infected with the virus. Mosquitoes get infected with WNV by feeding on infected birds and they can transmit the virus to other animals, birds, and humans.

Most people infected with West Nile virus will not have any symptoms. Of the approximately twenty percent of infected people who do develop symptoms, most have milder symptoms such as fever, headaches, body aches, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. Symptoms begin between 3 to 14 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and typically last a few days, although people have become ill for several weeks. People who become ill should contact their healthcare provider.

In rare cases, West Nile virus can cause severe disease with symptoms in addition to headache and fever, such as muscle weakness, stiff neck, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, paralysis, coma, and potentially death. Older people are at greater risk of developing severe illness.

Preventing mosquito bites will prevent West Nile virus infection. Since all mosquitoes need water to lay their eggs and complete their life cycle, reducing or eliminating standing water reduces potential breeding sites, mosquito numbers and the risk for mosquito bites. Below are some measures to help decrease exposure to mosquitoes:

- Limit time spent outside at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Apply insect repellent to skin and spray clothing with insect repellent since mosquitoes may bite through clothing. CDC recommends using products that contain active ingredients approved and registered by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

- Make sure window and door screens are in good repair to prevent mosquito entry.
- Properly dispose of items that hold water such as tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or discarded tires.
- Clean roof gutters and down-spouts for proper drainage.
- Turn over wheelbarrows, wading pools, boats, and canoes when not in use.
- Change the water in birdbaths and pet dishes at least every three days.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs; drain water from pool covers.
- Trim tall grass, weeds and vines since mosquitoes use these areas to rest during hot daylight hours.
- Landscape to prevent water from pooling in low-lying areas.

There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus other than to treat symptoms. If you think you have a West Nile virus infection, contact your healthcare provider.

State health officials have monitored the spread of WNV since 2001. The surveillance program monitors wild birds, horses and people for West Nile virus. In 2002, the state documented its first human infections with 52 human cases. This was followed by 17 human cases in 2003 and in 12 in 2004, 17 in 2005, 21 in 2006 and 12 in 2007.

For more information on West Nile virus, go to <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/westNilevirus/> or <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>

For more information regarding mosquito repellents, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/qa/insectrepellent.htm>