

WEST NILE VIRUS
05/10/04
Information Line 778-3911, Option 4

The beginning of warm weather is a reminder that mosquito season is not far away. West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne infection that can cause illness in humans. The virus mainly affects birds but can be transmitted to animals and humans when bitten by a mosquito that is infected with the virus. In Broome County and across the United States, residents are encouraged to take steps to reduce mosquito-breeding habitats on their property. In New York State, where West Nile Virus was first detected in 1999, it remains a concern as warm weather approaches.

Most WNV infected humans have no symptoms, a small portion develop flu like symptoms such as headache, fever, body ache, rash and swollen lymph glands. Less than 1% of infected people develop severe illness that causes encephalitis. Individuals aged 50 and above are at highest risk for serious illness.

Because mosquitoes spread West Nile Virus, protecting yourself against mosquito bites is the best way to avoid the transmission of the disease. "Mosquitoes are generally thought of as merely a nuisance, but occasionally, a mosquito bite can transmit disease," said Jan Chytilo, Director of Health Education for the Broome County Health Department. "There are about 70 mosquito species in New York State, and a handful of them can transmit West Nile Virus," she added. "It is important to keep West Nile Virus in perspective," said Ms. Chytilo. "In the United States, there have been no deaths from SARS, 262 deaths from West Nile Virus in 2003, and at least 36,000 deaths yearly from Flu related illness. In other words, dying from West Nile Virus is very unlikely."

The type of mosquitoes known to transmit West Nile Virus prefer to live in and around artificial containers (pots, buckets, rain barrels, abandon swimming pools and tire piles). Make sure your home is protected from mosquitoes by keeping window and door screens in good repair. Reduce the mosquito population around your home and property by emptying water-holding containers, emptying or filling in swimming pools that are no longer used, maintaining swimming pools that are in use by filtering and chemically treating the water, and keeping rain gutters free of leaves. Remove scrap tires from your property, as they are a prime-breeding source for mosquitoes. Tires can accumulate small pools of water where adult mosquitoes will lay their eggs. Over the course of one breeding season, thousands of mosquitoes can be generated from just one tire. Many municipalities sponsor programs to dispose of tires. County residents should watch the news media for tire collection events taking place in their municipality. Residents should report tire piles or abandoned swimming pools to the Health Department at 778-2887 during regular business hours.

"Most mosquitoes do NOT transmit disease, therefore, it is not necessary to limit daytime outdoor activities," stated Ms. Chytilo. In addition to reducing mosquito-breeding habitats around your home, residents can reduce the risk of being bitten by mosquitoes with the following tips:

- Minimize outdoor activities between dusk and dawn.
- Wear shoes and socks, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt when you are outdoors for long periods of time, or when mosquitoes are most active.
- Consider using mosquito repellent containing DEET when it is necessary to be outdoors. Make sure to follow the directions on the label.

Dead Crow sightings provide the earliest indication of WNV in an area. This year, Dr. Clark, Associate Professor of Biological Sciences, at Binghamton University will be conducting research on ill Crow behavior and will be collecting ill and dead Crow, or Blue Jay, reports from residents. Broome County residents can report ill or dead crows by contacting Dr. Clark at Binghamton University by telephone at 777-6228 or e-mail at crowrsch@binghamton.edu. Residents can report other types of dead birds to the United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Service Hotline toll free, at 1-866-537-2473. As in past years, not all birds will be collected and tested. Bird specimens collected and calls reporting dead birds will be recorded for research purposes only.

Live or dead birds that are found pose no immediate health threat to the public. These calls do not require an emergency response. If possible, cover the bird with a bucket or box. If directions on what to do with the bird cannot be obtained from Dr. Clark, use gloves or a shovel to place the bird in the garbage.

For more information on West Nile Virus, call the Broome County Health Department West Nile Virus Information Line at 607-778-3911, option 4. More West Nile Virus information can be found on the Health Department website at www.gobroomecounty.com/safety.