



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTACT: Kera Brossette
(309) 888-5489

West Nile Virus Surveillance Underway

BLOOMINGTON – As temperatures warm and peak mosquito season approaches, surveillance efforts for West Nile Virus (WNV) are now underway in McLean County. The McLean County Health Department will monitor virus activity in birds and mosquitoes throughout the 2014 mosquito season, from May to October.

Culex mosquitoes, more commonly known as “house mosquitoes,” become infected with the virus by feeding on infected birds. Those mosquitoes then seek blood meals and subsequently infect humans and animals. The health department will test mosquitoes for WNV throughout the summer to help assess the level of immediate risk to humans.

“As the weather turns nice and individuals spend more time outdoors, it is important to take precautions to protect yourself from mosquito bites and West Nile Virus,” McLean County Health Department Director Walt Howe said. “Simple, everyday actions such as wearing protective clothing, using insect repellent and eliminating standing water near your home provide significant defense from virus-spreading mosquito bites.”

The health department will begin collecting and testing dead birds this month. McLean County residents who find a dead bird on their property should:

1. Contact the Environmental Health Division at (309) 888-5482. The department will only collect and test a limited number of birds. Birds are only collected Monday through Thursday for testing. Birds eligible for testing must be dead for no longer than 24 hours and have no obvious signs of trauma. Those submitting bird specimens will receive further instructions at the time of the call.
2. To dispose of a dead bird that the health department cannot accept, adults should use gloves or tongs to place the dead bird inside two plastic bags. Residents living within municipal limits should place the bird in the trash. Rural residents who decide to bury the bird should assure that the location is safely away from water sources. Never handle a dead bird with bare hands, and always wash hands with soap and warm water after disposal.

Last year, McLean County had two reports of WNV-positive birds, one in Bloomington and one in Normal, and two positive human cases. In 2013, 117 Illinois residents were infected with WNV, resulting in 11 deaths. Seventy-six of Illinois' 102 counties had humans, birds, mosquitoes and/or horses test positive for the virus.

Residents are advised to take the following precautions to reduce their risk of mosquito bites:

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- REDUCE exposure—wear protective clothing at dawn and dusk (the times of the day when the type of mosquito that carries WNV is most active), clean rain gutters, repair and replace worn screens on doors and windows, and eliminate stagnant, shallow water where mosquitoes breed (including bird baths, flower pots, wading pools, old tires and other receptacles).
- REPEL mosquitoes—apply insect repellent that contains DEET, picardin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus according to label instructions. Consult a physician before using repellents on infants.
- REPORT dead birds or standing water sources—contact the McLean County Health Department to report dead birds and areas of stagnant water in roadside ditches, shallow-flooded yards and similar locations that may provide breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

WNV is a mosquito-borne disease that can cause encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports approximately 80 percent of people who are infected with WNV do not show any symptoms. Up to 20 percent of the people who become infected show mild symptoms, such as a slight fever or headache. About one in 150 people infected with WNV develop severe illness, leading to high fever, disorientation, tremors, and even paralysis or death.

Persons at highest risk for serious illness are adults 50 years of age or older and people with compromised immune systems. Anyone concerned about their risk or experiencing symptoms should contact a physician immediately and inform the doctor of recent mosquito bites.

WNV surveillance and prevention efforts in McLean County are funded by a grant from the Illinois Department of Public Health. For more information, visit <http://health.mcleancountyil.gov/wnv>.

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