



# NEWS



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## First McLean County bird tests positive for West Nile Virus

BLOOMINGTON – A bird collected in the town of Chenoa by the McLean County Health Department tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV) by the Illinois Department of Public Health. This is the first positive account of WNV presence in McLean County in 2015.

McLean County is one of nine counties across the state to have WNV activity so far this year. The first WNV-positive mosquito collection occurred in northern Illinois in June. Last year, McLean County had two WNV-positive birds and no positive human cases. Statewide last year, 49 of the state's 102 counties had positive WNV cases involving humans, birds, mosquitoes and/or horses. Human cases numbered 44 and resulted in 4 deaths.

Today's findings serve as a caution as we enter into a holiday weekend that will likely include picnics, fireworks viewing, and other activities that extended time outdoors in the evening hours. According to McLean County Health Department Director Walt Howe, "McLean County citizens are encouraged to wear shoes and socks, long pants and long-sleeved shirts; plus, apply insect repellent that contains DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR 3535, when mosquitoes are most active -- especially between dusk and dawn. With all the recent rain, residents are also encouraged to eliminate all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding, to reduce their risk of West Nile Virus infection. Breeding areas can include water in bird baths, flowerpots, wading pools, old tires and any other receptacles."

Howe went on to explain that, "Because a bird tested positive for West Nile Virus in Chenoa, our environmental health staff will no longer accept birds from the 61726 zip code area, but will continue to closely monitor mosquito and bird activity throughout the county,"

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The health department will continue collecting and testing dead birds through mid-October, with the exception of birds from the 61726 zip code. 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 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.

WNV surveillance and prevention efforts in McLean County are funded by a grant from the Illinois Department of Public Health. For more information about WNV visit the health department's website at <http://health.mcleancountyil.gov/wnv>; or, go to [www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/wnv.htm](http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/wnv.htm).

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## Background

West Nile Virus is a mosquito-borne disease that can cause encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain. Culex mosquitoes, also known as the house mosquito, become infected with the virus by feeding on infected birds. Once infected, these mosquitoes produce more WNV-positive mosquitoes. WNV is transmitted to humans and animals when infected mosquitoes choose them for their blood meals. Residents are advised to take precautions to reduce their risk of contracting WNV by following the 3 R's:

- **REDUCE** exposure—wear protective clothing at dawn and dusk (the time when the Culex mosquito is most active), 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 water sources—contact the MCHD to report dead birds and areas of stagnant water in roadside ditches, flooded yards and similar locations that may create ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

WNV human infection occurs primarily from midsummer to early fall, although mosquitoes that can carry the disease may be present from mid-April through October. Mild cases of WNV can cause a slight fever or headache. Severe infections can lead to high fever, disorientation, and even paralysis or death. Persons at highest risk for serious illness are young children, 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 any recent mosquito bites.