



NEWS



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 12, 2016

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West Nile Virus Surveillance Underway

McLean County Health Department Currently Handling Bird Testing

BLOOMINGTON – With summer in full swing, surveillance efforts for West Nile virus (WNV) are underway in McLean County. The McLean County Health Department will monitor virus activity in mosquitoes and birds throughout the mosquito season, which typically ends in October. Bird testing this season is currently limited to that which can be performed at the health department until the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) identifies testing laboratories.

If you find a dead bird meeting the criteria below, please contact the Environmental Health Division at (309) 888-5482.

Birds eligible for testing should:

1. be dead for no more than 24 hours prior to collection; and accordingly, should show no signs of advanced decomposition (maggots, strong odor, dried or deflated eyes).
2. be free of obvious injuries such as wounds or missing parts. Likewise, crushed carcasses and birds found along roadways are not acceptable.
3. be a species of bird that is acceptable for testing. Testing performed at the health department is focused on dead crows and blue jays; however, once IDPH identifies independent laboratories for testing, bird species can also include grackles, starlings, robins, cardinals, sparrows, finches, hawks and owls. Birds that will not be accepted include pigeons, ducks, geese, chickens, other large birds and endangered species.

The health department is only authorized to collect a limited number of birds each season. Testing decisions are based on bird species, condition of the carcass, and location of death. If a bird has already tested positive from a location in the county, there is often no need to test additional birds from that city or locale.

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To dispose of a dead bird that the health department cannot accept, adults should:

1. use non-cloth gloves made of rubber, latex, or a plastic bag over your hands; or, use a shovel, tongs or other instrument to pick up the bird and place it in a plastic bag.
2. seal the plastic bag and place it inside a second plastic bag and seal it.
3. place the bird in the trash, if you live within municipal limits.
4. bury the bird in a location that is safely away from water sources, if you are a rural resident.
5. wash your hands with soap and warm water immediately after disposing of the bird.

Because WNV generally appears and grows in Illinois bird and mosquito populations before it is transmitted to humans, monitoring bird and mosquito populations helps predict when and where humans will be at risk for West Nile virus infection as well as where and when additional precautions and control measures should be taken.

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.

It is during this time of the year that the health department strongly encourages all residents to follow the 3 R's:

REDUCE: * Limit outdoor activity when mosquitoes are most active
 * Replace torn or missing screens on doors and windows
 * Eliminate stagnant, standing water around your home weekly

REPEL: * Wear protective clothing such as pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks when possible
 * Apply insect repellent with an active ingredient like DEET and follow label directions

REPORT: * Report dead birds and standing water sources

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>.

The McLean County Health Department is dedicated to the prevention and control of disease through health promotion, early intervention and health protection within our county. "Like" McLeanHealth on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter, for information about public health affecting you.

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