



# NEWS



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## **West Nile Virus Surveillance Activities Have Begun** *McLean County Health Department Accepting Birds for Testing*

BLOOMINGTON – With the mild winter and recent summer-like temperatures, mosquitoes are out early in McLean County prompting the McLean County Health Department to begin accepting birds for testing for the presence of West Nile virus. Dead bird reports are often the first indication that West Nile virus is active in an area and allows the health department to monitor virus activity in the county as part of its annual West Nile virus surveillance activities.

Anyone finding a dead bird in McLean County should contact the Environmental Health Division at (309) 888-5482 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, if the bird meets the following testing guidelines:

1. Birds must have died within 24 hours of collection; and accordingly, show no signs of advanced decomposition (maggots, strong odor, dried or deflated eyes).
2. Birds must be free of obvious injuries such as wounds or missing parts, or be in any way crushed or found along roadways.

The health department is authorized to collect a limited number of birds each West Nile virus 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 same city or locale. Bird species tested include: crow, jay, magpie, raven, sparrow, finch, grackles, starlings, robins, cardinals, hawks and owls. Birds that will not be accepted include: pigeons, ducks, geese, chickens, other large birds and endangered species.

It is extremely unlikely that a person would contract West Nile virus from a dead bird; however, safety precautions are recommended when handling any dead animals. To safely dispose of a dead bird that the health department cannot accept, adults should be mindful of possible leaking fluids, sharp beaks, and claws, and always:

- Wear non-cloth disposable gloves made of rubber or latex, a plastic bag over your hands if gloves are not available, or use a shovel or tongs to pick up the bird and place it in a plastic bag.
- Seal the plastic bag once the bird is in it and place the bag inside a second plastic bag and seal it.

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- Place the bird in the trash, if you live within municipal limits.
- Bury the bird in a location that is safely away from water sources, if you are a rural resident
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water immediately after disposing of the bird.

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. The West Nile virus season usually starts in the late May/early June timeframe and continues until mid-October.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports approximately 80 percent of people who are infected with West Nile virus 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 West Nile virus 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 reminds residents that mosquito bites are bad and strongly encourages everyone 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

West Nile virus is just one disease transmitted by mosquitoes in Illinois. Preventing mosquito bites from occurring also helps protect against several strains of mosquito-borne encephalitis. When traveling out of state or throughout the world, actively taking steps to avoid mosquito bites can help protect against Zika, Malaria, Chikungunya, Dengue and Yellow Fever.

West Nile virus 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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