



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First West Nile virus activity of 2017 detected in Michigan
Residents urged to protect against mosquito bites

LANSING, Mich. – The first West Nile virus activity for Michigan in 2017 has been confirmed in three birds across the state. West Nile virus has been identified in one turkey found in Barry County, and two crows – one from Kalamazoo County and one from Saginaw County. Residents are reminded that the best way to protect against West Nile virus and other mosquito-borne illnesses is to prevent mosquito bites.

People who work in outdoor occupations or like to spend time outdoors are at increased risk for West Nile virus infection from mosquito bites. Adults 50 years old and older have the highest risk of severe illness caused by West Nile virus.

Symptoms of West Nile virus include a high fever, confusion, muscles weakness, and a severe headache. More serious complications include neurological illnesses, such as meningitis and encephalitis. Last year, there were 43 serious illnesses and three deaths related to West Nile virus in Michigan. Nationally, there were 2,038 human cases of the virus and 94 deaths reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Everyone older than six months of age should use repellent outdoors,” said Dr. Eden Wells, chief medical executive of MDHHS. “It only takes one bite from an infected mosquito to cause a severe illness, so take extra care during peak mosquito-biting hours, which are dusk and dawn for the mosquitoes that transmit West Nile virus.”

Repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and some oil of lemon eucalyptus and para-menthane-diol products provide longer-lasting protection. For both safety and effectiveness, repellents should be used according to the label instructions.

The mosquitoes that transmit West Nile virus may breed near people’s homes in storm drains, shallow ditches, retention ponds, and unused pools. They will readily come indoors to bite if window and door screens are not maintained. As summer temperatures rise, mosquitoes and the virus develop more quickly so it is important to protect yourself from mosquito bites as the weather warms.

The three West Nile virus positive birds were found sick or dead in early May and tested positive at Michigan State University this week. Birds are the natural animal reservoir for the virus and carry it in their blood. Mosquitoes become infected when they bite an infected bird.

Most birds show no symptoms of infection, but certain bird species, such as crows, blue jays and ravens, are more sensitive to the virus and are more likely to become sick and die when they become infected with the virus.

"As with many wildlife diseases, vigilant observation and reporting from the public are critical in helping health and wildlife experts better understand and contain the transmission of West Nile Virus," said Dr. Kelly Straka, state wildlife veterinarian. "We ask residents to contact us if they find sick or dead crows, blackbirds, owls or hawks, or any other bird exhibiting signs of illness."

For information about West Nile virus activity in Michigan and to report sick or dead birds, visit www.michigan.gov/westnile. Additional information can be found at www.cdc.gov/westnile.

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