



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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West Nile Virus Surveillance Underway

BLOOMINGTON – Surveillance efforts for West Nile virus are now underway in McLean County, as well as in other counties throughout Illinois. The McLean County Health Department will monitor virus activity in birds and mosquitoes during the 2009 mosquito season. The department will also launch a public information campaign to remind people to take personal precautions from mosquito bites and eliminate mosquito breeding sites.

“As warmer weather approaches, it is important for everyone to take the proper precautions to protect themselves from West Nile virus,” said McLean County Health Department Director Walt Howe. “The health department will continue its surveillance of birds and mosquitoes this year and we encourage residents to be vigilant about the virus as well,” he added.

In May, the health department began collecting and testing dead birds. McLean County residents who find a dead bird on their property should do the following:

1. Contact the Environmental Health Division at (309) 888-5482 to find out if the department is still accepting birds for testing. 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 must have no obvious signs of trauma. Those submitting 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. Then, place the bird in the trash or bury it away from water sources. After handling a dead bird, hand washing using soap and warm water is essential.

In mid-May, the health department also began testing mosquitoes for West Nile virus, which helps to assess the level of immediate risk to humans. Typically, a mosquito pool sample testing positive for West Nile virus indicates that the first human case of the virus is likely to occur in the following three weeks. In 2008, 20 Illinois residents were infected with West Nile virus and one person died.

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Residents are encouraged to take the following precautionary measures to protect themselves from mosquitoes:

- Limit time spent outdoors between dusk and dawn
- Wear protective clothing, such as long sleeves, long pants and socks, when outdoors
- Apply insect repellent that contains DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus according to label instructions
- Repair or replace window and door screens
- Trim grass, shrubs and weeds
- Drain standing water around property
- Empty flower pots, pet bowls, barrels, tires, and other items that hold water
- Clean rain gutters

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne disease that can cause encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain. *Culex* mosquitoes become infected with the virus by feeding on infected birds; those mosquitoes then seek blood meals and subsequently infect humans and animals. West Nile virus was first detected in the United States in New York in the fall of 1999 and in Illinois in 2001. Prior to that, the virus had only been found in Africa, Eastern Europe and West Asia. West Nile virus cases occur primarily in midsummer to early fall, although mosquitoes that can carry the disease may be present from mid-April through October.

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 the health department's website at www.mcleancountyil.gov/health or call 309-888-5450.

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