



NEWS RELEASE



For Immediate Release

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(5/7/24) - Southern 7 Health Department Begins Annual Testing for West Nile Virus

Southern 7 Health Department has begun its annual trapping of mosquitoes throughout the lower seven counties in Illinois to test for West Nile Virus (WNV); the leading cause of mosquito-borne disease in the continental United States. There are no vaccines to prevent or specific medications to treat WNV in people, but there are steps you can take to prevent contracting the disease.

West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of a *Culex pipiens* mosquito, commonly called a house mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird. Monitoring for WNV in Illinois includes laboratory tests for mosquito batches, dead crows, blue jays, robins and other perching birds, as well as testing sick horses and humans with West Nile virus-like symptoms. People who see a sick or dying crow, blue jay, robin or other perching bird should contact their local health department, which will determine if the bird will be picked up for testing.

The virus is not spread through coughing, sneezing, or touching. It is not spread by touching live or dead animals, however, avoid bare-handed contact when touching any dead animal. If you are disposing of a dead bird, use gloves or double plastic bags to place the carcass in a garbage can. The virus also cannot be spread through eating infected birds or animals. Always follow instructions for fully cooking meat from either birds or mammals.

Common symptoms of West Nile virus include fever, nausea, headache and muscle aches. Symptoms may last from a few days to a few weeks. However, four out of five people infected with WNV will not show any symptoms. In rare cases, severe illness including meningitis, encephalitis, or even death, can occur. People over the age of 60 and individuals with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for severe illness from the virus. If you have symptoms of West Nile virus, contact your physician immediately.

There are no vaccines to prevent or medications to treat WNV in people. You can reduce your risk of WNV by following the three "R's" – Reduce, Repel, and Report.

- **REDUCE** - make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or other openings. Try to keep doors and windows shut. Eliminate, or refresh each week, all sources of standing water where mosquitoes can breed, including water in bird baths, ponds, flowerpots, wading pools, old tires, and any other containers.
- **REPEL** - when outdoors, wear shoes and socks, long pants and a light-colored, long-sleeved shirt, and apply insect repellent that contains DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR 3535 according to label instructions. Consult a physician before using repellents on infants. Do not use products containing oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) or para-menthane-diol (PMD) on children under 3 years old. Do not apply insect repellent to a child's hands, eyes, mouth, cuts, or irritated skin. Spray insect repellent onto your hands and then apply to a child's face.
- **REPORT** – report locations where you see water sitting stagnant for more than a week such as roadside ditches, flooded yards, and similar locations that may produce mosquitoes. The local health department or city government may be able to add larvicide to the water, which will kill any mosquito eggs.

Trapping mosquitoes will continue until early fall. For more information, call Miranda Adams, S7HD Environmental Health Services Director at 618-634-2297 x. 973114, visit www.southern7.org, or download the Southern 7 app.

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