



NEWS RELEASE

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The Niagara County Health Department announced that a crow collected by Environmental Health sanitarians from Treichler Street in North Tonawanda last week, tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV) today; the first in Niagara County for 2008. The infectious virus is transmitted by mosquitoes to birds, animals and humans. Environmental Health Director, James Devald is urging Niagara County residents to take extra measures to protect themselves from this potentially serious illness.

To date, New York State Department of Health has reported positive WNV results for 4 humans (Nassau Co. and NYC), 65 birds (Suffolk, Onondaga, Erie, Nassau, Albany, Dutchess, Putnam, Livingston, Monroe, Orleans, Rensselaer, Niagara and Tompkins), 1 horse in Onondaga and 210 mosquito pools (NYS, Nassau, Suffolk, Rockland, Westchester, Erie and Dutchess). Prior to last week, the Department collected, identified, and submitted 24 mosquito pools and 8 dead birds for testing. All results in 2008 were previously negative for WNV, until today.

"In recent years, we've seen a decline in the number of WNV positive human cases statewide", Mr. Devald noted. "However, we must remain vigilant in our efforts to take precautions. These findings should remind all New Yorkers that we must renew our efforts to reduce the potential for serious illness by protecting ourselves from mosquito bites".

WNV infection sometimes causes mild, "flu-like" symptoms among people, but can also result in serious complications, such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). Individuals aged 50 years or older, are at greatest risk of becoming seriously ill from WNV.

In New York State, the health risk from WNV increases as the summer progresses, and the disease spills over from its reservoir of bird-feeding mosquitoes into species that bite people. In the Northeast region of the nation, most human cases occur during August and September.

The best way to avoid WNV infection is to prevent mosquito bites. Keep mosquitoes out of the house by making sure that screens are in good repair. High-risk individuals, particularly the elderly, should limit the amount of time they spend outdoors between dusk and dawn, or other times when mosquitoes are feeding. For protection against bites, wear long sleeves and long pants outdoors, especially during evening and early morning hours when mosquitoes are most active. Also, consider using an insect repellent to cover exposed skin. Always follow label instructions, and be especially careful when applying repellents to children.

DEET (N-diethyl-meta-toluamide)-based insect repellents have been on the market for years to protect against mosquito bites, and are still recommended. In 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began recommending two alternatives to insect repellents containing DEET.

Picaridin, also known as KBR 3023, is the active ingredient found in many mosquito repellents previously used in Europe, Australia, Latin America and Asia. Research indicates that it works well, and is comparable with DEET products of similar concentration. The other repellents are oil of lemon eucalyptus (also known as p-menthane 3,8-diol or PMD), a plant-based mosquito repellent and IR3535, ethyl ester, both of which provide protection time similar to low concentration DEET products. All have now been approved for sale in New York State. Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus, PMD, and IR3535 are derived from natural materials.

Human health risk from West Nile virus is highest when the amount of virus intensifies in a particular location. All New Yorkers are urged to help interrupt the infection cycle between birds and mosquitoes by continuing to take steps to reduce areas of standing water around their properties where mosquitoes can breed.

PUBLIC HEALTH: PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT

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The following strategies are recommended to reduce mosquito-breeding sites and mosquito exposure:

- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots and similar water-holding containers.
- Remove all discarded tires on your property. Used tires have become the most common mosquito breeding ground in the country.
- Drill holes in the bottom of recycling containers that are kept outdoors.
- Make sure gutters drain properly, and clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Change the water in birdbaths regularly.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs.
- Use landscaping to eliminate stagnant water that collects on your property; clean up leaf litter and similar organic debris.
- Make sure windows have screens in good repair
- Wear long sleeves and long pants while out during early morning and late evening

Dead birds, particularly crows, continue to be excellent indicators of the presence of West Nile Virus. Persons who notice dead crows or blue jays are encouraged to report the sighting, including details about where the bird is located, to this department at 439-7583. Even if the bird is not collected and tested, the report itself will provide vital information. Other dead birds need to be reported to a state-wide toll-free number: 1-866-537-BIRD.

The Niagara County and New York State Department of Health has many informational materials about West Nile Virus and how New Yorkers can help to "Fight the Bite." These materials are posted on the Department's web sites at www.niagaracounty.com and the New York State Department of Health website at www.nyhealth.gov.

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