

## **ANOTHER YEAR WITH WEST NILE VIRUS**

From Crawford County & Galion City Health Departments

Another mosquito season is just around the corner and that brings along with it an increased risk of exposure to West Nile Virus. The West Nile Virus is a mosquito-borne viral disease that can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) and is fatal to a small percentage of the population.

West Nile Virus is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. When a mosquito bites a bird that carries the virus, the mosquito becomes infected. It is believed that people cannot get West Nile Virus directly from another person, or animal, that has the disease. It is believed that this disease is only transmitted by mosquitoes. Most cases resolve themselves within 3-5 days, but they can reoccur. Approximately 80% of the people who have it are asymptomatic; do not show signs of having the disease. People who are infected may experience fever, headache, body aches, skin rash, and swollen lymph glands. The most susceptible individuals are the elderly, very young, and those that are immuno-compromised.

In 2001 the Ohio Department of Health first discovered West Nile Virus in Ohio in six live birds and 280 dead birds. In 2002 Ohio had its first human case of West Nile Virus and eventually had a total of 441 human cases of West Nile Virus including 31 deaths, 645 positive cases of West Nile Virus in horses (of which one-third either died or were euthanized). By the end of 2002, West Nile Virus was found in all 88 counties. According to Ohio Department of Health data, in 2008 there were 15 cases including one fatality.

This is the first year that local health departments will no longer be submitting dead birds to the Ohio Department of Health for testing. However, for surveillance purposes, it is important that county residents continue to contact the health department to report dead birds. Specifically, the health district needs to know the type of bird found and the location. Residents in Bucyrus and rural Crawford County should contact the Crawford County General Health District at 419-562-5871.

Residents in Galion City and Crestline City should contact the Galion City Health Department at 419-468-1075.

If you find a dead bird in your yard please follow these instructions: Do not use your bare hands to handle the bird (you cannot get the West Nile Virus from contact with a dead bird); wear gloves or use some other manner to handle the bird to protect yourself from other parasites that live on birds. Place the dead bird in a plastic baggie and then place it into another baggie and dispose of it with your normal garbage.

We are asking for your help to prevent the spread of West Nile Virus by eliminating mosquito breeding sites around your property. Mosquitoes need water in order to reproduce. Is there standing or stagnant water anywhere around your home? Bird baths should be emptied at least once a week. Any other containers that hold water should be emptied and stored so that they will no longer hold water. There is a product available at local stores that are termed “mosquito dunks” that can be placed in standing water. It is a natural bacteria that kills the larvae before they hatch and is safe to humans and animals. Remove, cover, or store unused tires inside. If you are not using the tires take them to a recycling center. If you have a pond you should consider aerating it so that mosquitoes don’t breed in the shallows. If you have a septic system make sure that it is working properly and not causing wet areas in the yard that would allow mosquitoes to breed. Also look around your neighborhood for streams or roadside ditches that aren’t flowing. Contact the appropriate individuals to try and have the matter corrected.

Individually you can protect yourself by avoiding the peak exposure time which is at dusk. Also wear light colored clothing with long sleeves or long pants when you cannot avoid being exposed to mosquitoes. Use repellents carefully. More is not necessarily better so read the product label instructions and follow their recommendations. Certain repellents may not be appropriate for younger children. You can also replace the screens in your home. A No. 16 mesh screen should be used to help keep mosquitoes out of your home and from biting you while you sleep.

