

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact/Phone: Steve Todd, Director of Environmental Health 269-273-2161 x231

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Blue Jay tests positive for West Nile Virus in Washtenaw County

Fact: Last year was a light year for West Nile Virus (WNV) in Michigan, 16 cases, no deaths. **Fact:** The 2 years prior to that, 2002 and 2003, were bad years for WNV, with more than 600 cases statewide and more than 50 deaths. West Nile Virus is a fact of life in Michigan, and as a result we need to keep our guard up. A blue jay in Washtenaw County (Ann Arbor area) has now become the first bird to test positive for West Nile Virus in Michigan this year (Testing occurs April through October). And so it begins.

Health Departments statewide are now on the lookout for dead birds (crows, blue jays, ravens) that are an indicator of the spread of the disease. Mosquitoes that have bitten infected birds then spread the virus to both humans and horses. Exposure to mosquitoes needs to be minimized to reduce the possibility of infection. As I am sure most of you know, this time of year is typically the start of the mosquito season in Michigan. Spring cleanup can be just the right tool for reducing the possibility of WNV for you and your family. **Remember, mosquitoes love to lay eggs in small collections of standing water.** So, keeping standing water out of buckets, horse troughs, barrels, flower pots, bird baths, gutters (yep, it's time to get out the ladder), and out of old tires is just what is needed to reduce the places where these pests can breed.

Most persons (4 in 5) who do become infected with WNV will show no symptoms of illness at all. However, those that do will begin to show symptoms between 3 and 15 days after being bitten. One-in-five infected persons will have mild illness with fever, and about one in 150 infected people will become severely ill and the effects of the illness can be permanent.

People 55 and older are more susceptible to severe WNV disease symptoms. Physicians are urged to test patients for WNV if a patient has fever and signs of meningitis or encephalitis, or sudden painless paralysis in the absence of stroke in the summer months. Persons donating blood need not be concerned as blood donor screening for WNV is expected to continue in 2005.

In addition to our warning about standing water, we recommend the following during the spring and summer months to reduce the possible exposure to WNV:

- Minimize being outdoors, if possible, when mosquitoes are most active (dawn and dusk)
- Wear light colored long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors
- Apply insect repellants that contain the active ingredient DEET to exposed skin or clothing. Always follow the manufacturer's directions for use. (Avoid applying

repellent to children less than 2 years of age, and to the hands of older children because repellents may be transferred to the eyes or mouth potentially causing irritation or adverse health effects).

- Maintain window and door screening to help keep mosquitoes out.

To help your health department monitor the risk and spread of WNV, we encourage folks to report (do not handle dead birds) the sightings of sick and dead birds. To report a sighting, please use the web-based reporting form by visiting our web site at www.bhsj.org, choose Environmental Health from the front page and then go the to bottom of the page. Additionally, you can view maps of the most current WNV activity in both humans and horses on the web at www.bhsj.org. as well as download a fact sheet so you know what to look for and what to avoid. If you do not have internet access, you can call your local health department office at the numbers listed below, or you can call the statewide toll-free number at: 1-888-668-0869 for updated information.

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency Environmental Health Offices

Branch - 279-9561 ext. 106 Hillsdale - 437-7395 ext. 111 St. Joseph - 273-2161 ext. 233

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