

## **Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **West Nile Virus is Back... Fight the Bite!**

**Coldwater, MI.** The sun is shining, the weather is hot, the lakes are satisfying, and the mosquitoes are biting. Hot, dry weather provides significant potential for acquiring mosquito borne illnesses, such as the West Nile Virus. The West Nile Virus (WNV) has recently been identified in two different counties in the state of Michigan. A mosquito pool was found positive for the virus in Saginaw County. In Washtenaw County, a wild turkey tested positive as well. These two cases are a clear sign that the virus is circulating throughout the state and presents a major health risk for all residents. According to the Michigan Department of Community Health these cases represent the earliest detection of WNV activity in Michigan in several years. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency urges county residents to remember to apply repellents during peak mosquito biting periods (dusk and dawn) and drain standing water around their homes.

The West Nile Virus is a mosquito borne virus. It can cause inflammation of the brain or inflammation of the lining of the brain or spinal cord. The WNV is most commonly infected and spread through birds but can be passed onto humans through bites of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected by feeding on birds that have the virus. Other animals that have been known to be infected include: bats, cats, chipmunks, squirrels, skunks, horses and rabbits. The WNV first hit the U.S. in 1999 in New York City. The virus first appeared in Michigan in 2001.

The majority of humans infected with the WNV will show no symptoms. Those that do, report flu-like symptoms. These symptoms generally last a few days and include fever, fatigue, headache, body aches, and/or body rash. Severe cases can last a few weeks and symptoms may include fever, stiff neck, disorientation, tremors,

seizures, muscle weakness, loss of consciousness and in rare cases, death. Anyone that has been bitten by an infected mosquito can obtain the virus but persons 50 years of age and older are more susceptible to the more severe illness. Most birds infected with the virus die within three weeks of infection. Signs prior to death include uncoordinated flying or walking, weakness, lethargy, tremors, and abnormal head posture. Because this is caused by a virus, there is no antibiotic treatment. Precaution is the main component in containing the spread of the virus.

Rebecca Burns, Environmental Division Director for the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency states that community awareness is vital to preventing the disease "It is so important to keep our community safe; this includes safety from mosquito bites. By using these safety precautions we can eliminate the number of mosquitoes in our area. Everyone should do their part." She adds ""Hot and dry conditions favor development of the virus and the mosquitoes that transmit it. Mosquitoes may breed near people's homes in storm drains, shallow ditches, retention ponds, and unused pools. When these areas are not flushed out by rains, it becomes stagnant and highly organic, which is appealing to mosquitoes that can transmit the disease."

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency advises these safety precautions

- Reduce time outdoors, especially at dusk, during mosquito season (April – October)
- Weather permitting, wear light weight long sleeves, long pants and socks if you are outdoors
- If outdoors, apply insect repellent that contains the active ingredient DEET, on exposed skin and clothing
- Maintain window and door screens to keep mosquitoes out of buildings
- Drain standing water in the yard because they are potential mosquito breeding sites.
- Empty standing water from flower pot bases, clogged rain gutters, swimming pool covers, discarded tires, buckets, barrels, cans, etc.

- Report to DNR, or local health department any found dead corvids (crows, blue jays, and ravens) or any birds displaying symptoms stated above.
- If exposing of dead birds, do not handle with bare hands

Summer is a time for enjoying the outdoors, but please remember to protect yourself from mosquito bites. Look for the signs and symptoms of infected birds. Help others become aware of the virus. For more information about the WNV or how to keep you and your pets safe this summer visit these helpful online resources at the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), [Michigan Department of Community Health \(MDCH\)](#) or the Frequently Asked Question section on our website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org). Or call you county office at:

Branch County Office – 517-279-9561, ext. 106

Hillsdale Office – 517-437-7395, ext. 111

St. Joseph County Office – 269-273-2161, ext. 233

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