

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

West Nile Virus (WNV) Cases Climb

Coldwater. According to the Michigan Department of Community Health, Michigan is experiencing its earliest onset of West Nile Virus since it was identified in 1999. Hot, dry summer conditions like those seen this year are favorable for the mosquitos that are known to transmit the virus. Between 2008 and 2011, Michigan has reported a total of 84 people who have gotten sick with West Nile virus. As of August 27, 2012 there have been 81 cases of West Nile virus (WNV) illness in humans and three deaths this year alone and the numbers are still climbing.

West Nile Virus (WNV) is gotten through the bite of an infected mosquito. Most mosquitos are not infected with the virus. And while most people who do get bitten by an infected mosquito do not get sick, about one in five people may develop some symptoms. Unfortunately, one in 150 people will develop a serious illness. Symptoms usually appear in within 3 to 15 days. People 50 and older are more susceptible to severe WNV disease symptoms.

Mild symptoms of West Nile Virus, sometimes called West Nile Fever, may include some or all of the following symptoms:

- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Headache
- Lack of appetite
- Muscle aches

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- Nausea
- Rash
- Sore throat
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Vomiting

These symptoms usually last for 3 - 6 days.

More severe forms of disease, which can be life threatening, may be called West Nile Encephalitis or West Nile Meningitis, depending on what part of the body is affected. *Encephalitis* is the inflammation of the brain, while *meningitis* is the inflammation of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. The following symptoms can occur, and need prompt attention:

- Confusion or change in ability to think clearly
- Loss of consciousness or coma
- Muscle weakness
- Stiff neck
- Weakness of one arm or leg

Physicians are urged to test patients for WNV if they present with fever and signs of meningitis or encephalitis or sudden painless paralysis in the absence of stroke in the summer months.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency recommends that you wear mosquito repellent on exposed skin and clothes while you are outdoors. According to Steve Todd, Health Officer of the tri-county agency, "Using insect repellent keeps you from being what's for dinner. There are always excuses for not using repellent— forgot it, didn't want to go back and get it, it doesn't smell good, it's not in the budget, or 'mosquitoes don't bite me.' But repellents are an important necessity this year and can help to protect you from aches, pains, fatigue and/or hospitalizations and may even save your life."

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What repellent should I use? CDC recommends a variety of effective repellents. The most important step is to pick one and use it. There are those that can protect you for a short while in the backyard or a long while in the woods. DEET, picaridin, IR3535 and the plant-based oil of lemon eucalyptus are all repellents recommended by CDC. All contain an EPA-registered active ingredient and have been studied to make sure they are effective and safe.

When should you wear repellent? Mosquitoes can bite anytime. Most of the mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus bite from around sundown to around sun-up (throughout the night). Put a few bottles or packets of repellent around—in the car, by the door, in a purse or backpack.

Where are mosquitoes a problem? Almost all of the continental United States has had reports of people getting sick with West Nile virus. In Michigan, the majority of the identified cases have been occurred in Kent County and in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is maintaining a link on their website to assist you with tracking [Michigan's WNV occurrences](#).

What to do about mosquitoes in my area? When you use repellents, you can markedly reduce your chances of getting bitten. Also, be sure to also maintain window and door screenings to help keep mosquitoes out of buildings. Empty water from mosquito breeding sites such as buckets, unused kiddie pools, old tires or similar sites where mosquitoes lay eggs. Wear light colored, long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors.

Steve Todd goes on to remind residents “While we have not seen West Nile Virus in our three counties yet, we need to prepare as if it is already here. We are facing a long holiday weekend which is followed by kids going back to school. Many are looking forward to Friday night football games, after school cross country meets and many other outdoor activities that fall brings. By applying insect repellent before these events or you go outside, you can help assure that you and your family is protected from WNV. It’s as simple as that.” For more information about West Nile Virus or other mosquito-borne diseases, see our website at www.bhsj.org.

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