

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 Michigan Department of Community Health has confirmed that the first human case of West Nile Virus (WNV) for 2013 has been identified in St. Joseph County. The case involves an adult male, over the age of 50 years, from the southwest corner of St. Joseph County, who was hospitalized with symptoms and is now recovering. Earlier this year, a wild turkey found in Gratiot County displaying neurologic signs tested positive for WNV at Michigan State University. Since that time, six crows in Michigan (4 from Saginaw County; 1 from Bay County; and 1 from Midland County) and a cooper hawk in Wayne County have also tested positive. No WNV positive mosquito pools have been detected. 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. Last year, Michigan reported 202 WNV illnesses and 17 fatalities due to WNV.

The majority of humans infected with the WNV will show no symptoms. Those that do, report flu-like symptoms. These symptoms can begin within three to 15 days after exposure and generally last a few days. Symptoms 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, convulsions, paralysis, loss of consciousness and in rare cases, death. About one-in-five infected persons will have mild illness with fever. About one in 150 infected people will become severely ill. 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. When applying repellent to children, apply it to your own hands and rub them on the child. Avoid the eyes and mouth and do not

apply to children's hands because they sometimes put their hands in their mouths. Do not apply repellents to infants under 6 months of age and instead place nets over strollers and baby carriers.

- 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.
- Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas.
- Report to DNR, or local health department any found dead corvids (crows, blue jays, and ravens) or any birds displaying symptoms stated above. Citizens can report sightings of sick or dead birds on the West Nile virus website at www.michigan.gov/westnilevirus.
- If disposing dead birds, do not handle with bare hands.

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. For more information and surveillance activity about WNV, visit www.michigan.gov/westnilevirus or go to the Frequently Asked Question section on our website at www.bhsj.org. You can also call our 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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