

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

September 23, 2015

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dead Birds Test Positive for West Nile

Coldwater, MI. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency has been notified that four dead birds submitted to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Disease Laboratory have tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV). Three birds were submitted by Branch County residents in late August and early September. Another bird, a wild turkey, was submitted by a St. Joseph County resident in late August. “The positive birds mean that residents of these counties need to be more vigilant in their personal protective measures to prevent mosquito bites,” Steve Todd, Health Officer said.

West Nile virus is spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes acquire the virus by feeding on infected birds. “Tri-county residents should be aware of West Nile virus and take some simple steps to protect themselves against mosquito bites,” Steve Todd added. “The West Nile Virus seems to be here to stay, so the best way to avoid the disease is to reduce exposure to and eliminate breeding grounds for mosquitoes.”

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency recommends the following:

- Limit time spent outside at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Apply insect repellent to clothing, as well as exposed skin, since mosquitoes may bite through clothing. 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.

- Make sure window and door screens are in good repair to prevent mosquito entry.
- Properly dispose of items that hold water, such as tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots, or discarded tires.
- Clean roof gutters and downspouts for proper drainage.
- Turn over wheelbarrows, wading pools, boats, and canoes when not in use.
- Change the water in birdbaths and pet dishes at least every three days.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas, and hot tubs; drain water from pool covers.
- Trim tall grass, weeds, and vines since mosquitoes use these areas to rest during hot daylight hours.
- Landscape to prevent water from pooling in low-lying areas.

Steve Todd goes on to remind residents “While we have no human cases of West Nile in the tri-county area, we have received reports of human cases in other Michigan Counties, so we need to prepare as if it is already here. 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.”

The majority of people (80%) who are infected with West Nile virus do not get sick. Those who do become ill usually experience mild symptoms such as fever, headache, muscle ache, rash, and fatigue. Less than 1% of people infected with the virus get seriously ill with symptoms that include high fever, muscle weakness, stiff neck, disorientation, mental confusion, tremors, confusion, paralysis, and coma. Older adults (age 50+) and those with compromised immune systems are at greater risk of developing a central nervous system illness that could be fatal.

If you have questions about West Nile Virus or other mosquito-borne diseases, please visit our website at www.bhsj.org.

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