



Not a Crow  
Yellow beak!

## News from the Branch Hillsdale St. Joseph Community Health Agency

### West Nile Virus in Michigan

West Nile first began appearing in the U.S. in 1999 and in Michigan in 2001. In 2002 there were 614 cases of West Nile reported in Michigan, with 51 deaths. In 2003 and 2004 there were only 35 cases and 2 deaths. However, in 2005 there were 62 cases with 4 deaths and in 2006 there were 55 human cases with 7 deaths. Two of the reported cases were in our tri-county region. West Nile Virus is here to stay and we need to know what to do to protect ourselves and our families from this disease.

**What is West Nile?** West Nile is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the brain or spinal cord)

**How is it spread?** West Nile is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. The mosquito becomes infected by biting the birds that carry the virus (Crows, Blue jays and Ravens).

**Can you get west Nile from a Bird?** No. However dead birds and other dead animals carry a variety of diseases and therefore should never be handled with bare hands.

**Do other insects, such as ticks, cause West Nile?** Good question. No.

**What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?** Many persons have no symptoms or mild symptoms such as fever, headache and body aches. Some develop a mild rash or swollen lymph glands. At its most serious, mostly with the elderly, it can cause permanent neurological damage and even death. Symptoms of encephalitis include rapid onset of headache, high fever, stiff neck, confusion (more than usual) muscle weakness and even coma.

**How is West Nile Encephalitis treated?** There is no standard treatment. In severe cases, supportive therapy is often required, including hospitalization, IV fluids, preventive medication to reduce the possibility of pneumonia and other infections.

**Is there a vaccine for West Nile?** Not at this time. There is research underway. There is a vaccine currently available for horses.

**How long does it take to get sick once you are bitten?** Most people, who are bitten by an infected mosquito, show no symptoms and experience only a mild illness. If illness would occur, it takes between 3 and 15 days after being bitten.

**What can I do to reduce the risk for myself and my family?** From April to October, take the following precautions: Wear protective clothing (long sleeves, long pants) in mosquito infested areas

For more information visit the following web sites

[www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org) or [www.wnv.state.mi.us](http://www.wnv.state.mi.us)

Or

**Call the Branch – Hillsdale – St. Joseph Community Health Agency at**  
Coldwater – 517-279-9561 ext. 106 Hillsdale – 1-888-544-7395 ext. 111  
Three Rivers 1-800-258-1092 ext. 233

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