

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



## West Nile Virus

### What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?

West Nile Virus (WNV) causes an infection that results in swelling of the brain (encephalitis). In a small percentage of people infected by the virus, the disease can be serious, even fatal.

### How is West Nile Virus spread?

WNV is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. Horses bitten by mosquitoes that carry the virus can also become infected. A human or horse that has the disease cannot spread the virus. Whenever mosquitoes are active there is a risk of getting WNV, however, it is highest from late July through September.

### Is West Nile Virus in Oakland County?

In the summer of 2001, WNV was found in birds and mosquitoes in Oakland County and the State of Michigan. The first human cases of WNV were found in Oakland County in the summer of 2002. Federal, state and local officials continue to closely monitor the spread of this disease.

### What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment WNV infection. However, doctors can treat symptoms associated with the virus. Those over 50 years of age and those with immune problems or other chronic illnesses are more likely to become seriously ill.

### What are the symptoms?

Most people show no symptoms or have mild symptoms of the disease. Mild symptoms include fever, headache, muscle weakness, and body aches, often with skin rash and swollen lymph glands. More severe cases of the disease include headache, high fever, stiff neck, confusion, coma, tremors, paralysis and death.

### What can you do to protect yourself?

The best way to protect yourself is to minimize your contact with mosquitoes by:

- Eliminating standing water that collects in birdbaths, boats, buckets, tires, unused pools, roof gutters and other containers.
- Using insect repellents. Insect repellents containing no more than 35% DEET work best. Follow label directions carefully. Do not use repellents on children younger than two years of age. Repellents should be used sparingly on children 2 – 6 years of age containing only 10% DEET.
- Wearing protective clothing such as long sleeved shirts and pants.
- Limiting outdoor activity primarily between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Avoiding areas where mosquitoes may be present (i.e. shaded and wooded areas).
- Maintaining window and door screening to keep mosquitoes out of buildings.

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## Why report dead birds?

In 1999 a connection was made between an outbreak of human WNV infection and disease in birds, especially in American crows. Dead crows should be reported to Oakland County Health Division's Environmental Health Services Unit at **(877) 377-3641**. Avoid barehanded contact with dead birds and other animals. Use gloves or double plastic bags. Keeping track of the locations of dead birds is important in determining the level of human risk in a particular area.

## What is the Oakland County Health Division doing to protect people from WNV?

The Oakland County Health Division (OCHD) has a long-standing program to look for encephalitis viruses carried by mosquitoes. Every year, OCHD field staff collects mosquitoes for testing. OCHD will continue to inform the public of ways to prevent infection.

## For more information on West Nile Virus or to report dead crows, contact:

### **Oakland County Health Division**

Environmental Health Services – (877) 377-3641

[www.co.oakland.mi.us](http://www.co.oakland.mi.us)

### **State Contact**

Michigan Department of Agriculture

1-888-668-0869

[www.mda.state.mi.us/consumer/westnilevirus/](http://www.mda.state.mi.us/consumer/westnilevirus/)

### **National Contact**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Fax: 970-221-6476

E-mail: [dvbid@cdc.gov](mailto:dvbid@cdc.gov)

Web Site: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/dvbid.htm>

CDC Information Service: 1-888-232-3228

For additional copies, visit our website at [www.co.oakland.mi.us/health](http://www.co.oakland.mi.us/health) or contact:

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1200 N. Telegraph Road  
Pontiac, MI 48341-0432  
(248) 858-1308

Walled Lake Office  
1010 E. West Maple Road  
Walled Lake, MI 48390-3588

Southfield Office  
27725 Greenfield Road  
Southfield, MI 48076-3625  
(248) 424-7031

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