

Help Prevent West Nile Virus

Certain mosquito species carry the West Nile virus, which, when transmitted to people, can cause West Nile encephalitis, an infection that can result in an inflammation of the brain.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, all residents in areas where virus activity has been identified are at risk of getting West Nile encephalitis.

One bird has been identified with the West Nile virus in York County this year. There have been no confirmed human cases in Pennsylvania this year.

Individuals can take a number of measures around the home to help eliminate mosquito-breeding areas, including:

- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers that have collected on your property.
- Pay attention to discarded tires. Stagnant water is where most mosquitoes breed.
- Drill holes in the bottom of outdoor recycling containers.
- Have clogged roof gutters cleaned every year, particularly if the leaves from surrounding trees have a tendency to plug drains. Roof gutters can produce millions of mosquitoes each season.
- Turn over plastic wading pools when not in use. Stagnant water in a wading pool becomes a place for mosquitoes to breed.
- Turn over wheelbarrows and don't let water stagnate in birdbaths. Both provide breeding habitats for mosquitoes.
- Aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish. Water gardens can become major mosquito producers if they are allowed to stagnate.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools not in use. A swimming pool left untended by a family on vacation for a month can produce enough mosquitoes to result in neighborhood-wide complaints. Mosquitoes may even breed in the water that collects on pool covers.
- For stagnant pools of water, homeowners can buy Bti products at lawn and garden, outdoor supply, home improvement and other stores. This naturally occurring bacteria kills mosquito larva but is safe for people, pets, aquatic life and plants.

In addition, here are some simple precautions to prevent mosquito bites, particularly for people who are most at risk:

- Make sure screens fit tightly over doors and windows to keep mosquitoes out of homes.
- Consider wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks when outdoors, particularly when mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk, or in areas known for having large numbers of mosquitoes.
- When possible, reduce outdoor exposure at dawn and dusk during peak mosquito periods, usually April through October.
- Use insect repellants according to the manufacturer's instructions. An effective repellant will contain DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Consult with a pediatrician or family physician if you have questions about the use of repellant on children, as repellant is not recommended for children under the age of two months.

For online information about West Nile virus and the state's surveillance and control program, visit www.westnile.state.pa.us.