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The Wisconsin Division of Public Health: Dane County birds test positive for West Nile virus

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Public Health Madison & Dane County (PHMDC) reports that a dead bird found in Dane County has West Nile virus. This is the first bird that tested positive for West Nile virus in Dane County since monitoring for the mosquito-transmitted virus began May 1st.

“Finding this bird means that residents need to step up their efforts to prevent mosquito bites,” says Janel Heinrich, Director of PHMDC.

West Nile virus is spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes get the virus by feeding on infected birds, and are then able to pass it on to other birds and mammals when they bite.

Heinrich says “West Nile virus seems to be here to stay, so the best ways to avoid the disease are preventing mosquito bites and getting rid of breeding grounds for mosquitoes.”

PHMDC 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.

- Make sure window and door screens are in good repair to prevent mosquito entry.
- Properly dispose of items around your property 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 bird baths 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.

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

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has monitored the spread of West Nile virus since 2001 among birds, horses, mosquitoes, and people. In 2002, the state documented its first human infections, with 52 cases reported that year. During 2016, 13 cases of West Nile virus infection were reported among Wisconsin residents. West Nile virus infections in humans have been reported from June through October; however, most reported becoming ill with West Nile virus in August and September.

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health will continue surveillance for West Nile virus through the summer. To report a sick or dead crow, blue jay, or raven, please call the Dead Bird Reporting Hotline at 1-800-433-1610.

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For more information on West Nile virus:
http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/ArboviralDiseases/WestNileVirus/Index.htm