



## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# The Illinois Department of Public Health Urges Illinoisans to Take Precautions Against West Nile Virus

*Illinois Department of Public Health offers tips for avoiding mosquito bites*

**SPRINGFIELD** – As we start to see warmer weather, we will start to see mosquitoes, and that means West Nile virus. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) began accepting birds for West Nile virus testing on May 1, 2015. Local health departments will also collect birds and mosquito samples for West Nile virus testing in order to track the virus across Illinois.

“Since we started seeing human West Nile virus cases in Illinois back in 2002, 2,137 people have been infected, including 133 West Nile virus-related deaths,” said IDPH Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., JD. “While we have seen West Nile virus in Illinois over the past 13 years, it’s important that we don’t become complacent and that we continue to protect ourselves from mosquito bites.”

Predicting West Nile virus activity is like predicting the weather, it can change week to week. The key factors in determining high or low levels of West Nile virus activity are temperature and rainfall. Although people usually notice mosquitoes during rainy conditions, those mosquitoes are commonly called floodwater or nuisance mosquitoes and typically do not carry West Nile virus. In hot, dry weather, mosquitoes that do carry West Nile virus breed in stagnant water, like street catch basins and ditches, and multiply rapidly.

As temperatures warm up, remember to take some simple precautions to reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home and protect yourself from being bitten. Precautions include practicing the three “R’s” – reduce, repel and report.

- **REDUCE** exposure - minimize being outdoors when mosquitoes are most active, especially between dusk and dawn. If you go outside during these times, take precautions. Even if mosquito numbers seem low, it only takes one bite from an infected mosquito to transmit the virus.
  - Make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or other openings. Try to keep doors and windows shut, especially at night.

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- Eliminate, or refresh every couple days, all sources of standing water where mosquitoes can breed, including water in bird baths, ponds, flowerpots, wading pools, old tires, and any other receptacles.
- **REPEL** - when outdoors, wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, and apply insect repellent that contains DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR 3535, according to label instructions. Consult a physician before using repellents on infants.
  - **REPORT** – report dead birds to your local health department. In communities where there are organized mosquito control programs, contact your municipal government about areas of stagnant water in roadside ditches, flooded yards, and similar locations that may produce mosquitoes.

Additional information about West Nile virus can be found by logging onto [www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/west-nile-virus](http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/west-nile-virus).

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