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As the temperatures heat up, it's time to protect against West Nile virus

The Kane County Health Department is advising residents that as we see the temperatures warming up, we will start to see mosquitoes, and that means we could start seeing West Nile virus activity. It's never too early for residents to inspect their homes and yards for sources of standing water where mosquitoes are likely to breed.

Predicting West Nile virus activity is like predicting the weather, as 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.

The Health Department monitors for WNV activity by collecting mosquitoes in traps in your area. You can visit our Web site at http://kanehealth.com/wnv_surveillance.htm to view a map of the Health Department's trap locations throughout the county. Also as part of its West Nile program, the Health Department is collecting dead birds from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday to be sent to the state lab for testing. Please call (630) 444-3040 to report the presence of freshly-dead birds (such as crows or blue jays) to determine if WNV testing is recommended. The birds must not show any signs of decay, trauma, maggot or insect activity.

You can view more detailed monitoring results from previous years by visiting http://kanehealth.com/west_nile.htm.

West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird. Most people with the virus have no clinical symptoms of illness, but some may become ill three to 14 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. Only about two persons out of 10 who are bitten by an infected mosquito will experience any illness. Illness from West Nile is usually mild and includes fever, headache and body aches, but serious illness, such as encephalitis and meningitis, and death are possible. Persons older than 50 years of age have the highest risk of severe disease.

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The best way to prevent West Nile disease or any other mosquito-borne illness is to reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home and to take personal precautions to avoid mosquito bites. Precautions include:

- Avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are most active, especially between dusk and dawn. Use prevention methods whenever mosquitoes are present.
- When outdoors, wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, and apply insect repellent that includes DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus according to label instructions. Consult a physician before using repellents on infants.
- 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.
- Change water in birdbaths weekly. Properly maintain wading pools and stock ornamental ponds with fish. Cover rain barrels with 16-mesh wire screen. In communities where there are organized mosquito control programs, contact your municipal government to report 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 on the Kane County Health Department's Web site at www.kanehealth.com/west_nile.htm. You can also visit the Illinois Department of Public Health's (IDPH) Web site at www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/wnv.htm. People also can call the IDPH West Nile Virus Hotline at (866) 369-9710 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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