



CHCHD News

Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department

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Health Department's West Nile Surveillance Begins

Chattanooga, TN- In Hamilton County, the Health Department's Vector Control Program operates a surveillance program that collects and tests mosquitoes for West Nile Virus (WNV) throughout the mosquito season. The Health Department will begin annual West Nile Virus surveillance on May 3rd. Residents can support the efforts of this program and help to reduce the risk from the serious diseases mosquitoes can carry by following simple recommendations at home.

"Residents of Hamilton County can assist with their own protection from West Nile Virus by submitting dead Blue Jays and crows for West Nile virus testing," said Bonnie Deakins, Director of Environmental Services at the Health Department. "Bird surveillance is an integral part of the surveillance system and having the public's involvement helps us sample a much wider area."

To confirm that birds are still being tested from your area, call Environmental Health Services at 209-8110. Pick up the bird using a glove or clear plastic bag (place hand in bag, grasp the bird, pull bag over hand), and double-bag the bird inside a clear leak-proof bag. Keep bagged bird on ice or refrigerate, but do not place the bird in close contact with food (e.g., not in a household refrigerator or picnic cooler with food). Deliver the bird to the Health Department at 921 East 3rd Street in Chattanooga, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday-Friday.

Residents can also help control the mosquitoes by eliminating breeding sites on their own property. Anything that collects water can become a breeding ground for the type of mosquitoes that transmit WNV, so it's very important to empty or eliminate objects which hold water, especially after rainfall.

"Mosquito populations can emerge from very small amounts of water, if water is allowed to stagnate," Deakins said. "It is important to support local mosquito prevention and control efforts by eliminating standing water on your property."

West Nile Virus is a virus carried by mosquitoes that can cause illness in humans. Infected mosquitoes spread the virus from infected birds to humans. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, most people who contract WNV do not show any symptoms. However, about 20% of people experience symptoms such as fever, headache, nausea and vomiting, and an estimated 1 in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness.

Tips for reducing habitat and preparing the home:

- Tip out barrels, buckets, wheelbarrows, and children's wading pools
- Change water in birdbaths and animal bowls at least once a week
- Get rid of used tires or drill holes in them for draining
- Clean garden ponds
- Recycle old bottles, buckets and cans
- Clean leaf-clogged gutters

- Empty water from flower pot dishes and saucers
- Dump water off of tarps and plastic sheeting
- Repair leaky outdoor faucets
- Cover rain barrels with mosquito screens

Tips to protect yourself and “Fight the Bite”:

- Reduce outdoor activity from dusk to dawn, the peak biting time for many species of mosquitoes.
- Use insect repellents that contain DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR3535 (according to package instructions).
- Wear protective clothing when working or playing outdoors such as long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks.
- Keep windows and doors closed or cover them with screens to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home.

To find out more about Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department’s West Nile Virus surveillance, call (423) 209-8110 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday-Friday or visit the Health Department website at <http://health.hamiltontn.org>.