



COUNTY HEALTH MATTERS

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West Nile Virus

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Springtime: A Good Time to Fight West Nile Virus

Springtime is a time to spring-clean our neighborhoods and our communities. Now, with the increase of West Nile virus (WNV) in Missouri, these cleanups are becoming more important for our health. It's a perfect time to pick up trash, soda cans, foam cups, and old tires – anything that can hold the water that mosquitoes need to breed. Even a bottle cap can become a breeding ground for those disease-carrying pests. Eliminating trash and litter from a property can make a big difference protecting our community from West Nile virus.

Early spring is a great time for people to think ahead to summer and mosquito season. It's also a great time for local civic, service, and church groups to get together and organize a neighborhood or community cleanup day to focus on eliminating mosquito-breeding areas. By picking up trash, discarded tires, brush, draining standing water and cleaning out ditches that hold rainwater, work groups can do a lot to reduce the numbers of mosquitoes and the risk of West Nile virus in the community.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), West Nile virus is an established disease in North America that has the potential to flare up in the summer and continue into the fall. West Nile virus is most often spread by mosquitoes that bite-infected birds. The mosquitoes then carry the virus to people.

A common disease in other parts of the world for many years, West Nile virus was first found in the U.S. on the East Coast in the summer of 1999, and the first human cases in Missouri occurred in 2002. In 2003 Missouri had 64 WNV cases and eight WNV related deaths.

Although in most cases West Nile symptoms are similar to the flu, the disease has been known to cause severe disease and even death. That's why Missouri public health officials are urging communities to get involved in preventing WNV disease by cleaning up areas that could serve as mosquito-breeding habitat.

Here's what you can do:

- Search your own property and dispose of bottles, cans, bowls, flowerpots, plastic containers, or anything else that can harbor mosquito larvae.
- Organize a neighborhood cleanup day to focus on untended areas, curbs and gutters, and other overlooked mosquito-breeding grounds.
- Be on the lookout for old tires, which are a special problem.
- Drill holes in the bottom of recycling bins that remain outdoors.
- Keep roof gutters clean and flowing properly.
- Keep children's wading pools upside down when not in use, or change the water twice a week.



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- If you have a water garden or an ornamental pool, aerate it or stock it with mosquito-eating fish.
- Avoid mosquito-infested areas, and when you cannot, be sure to wear insect repellent with DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) as protection against mosquito bites.

People don't need to worry about limiting their outdoor activities, but they should cover exposed skin during the morning hours, before sunset and at nighttime. Insect repellent with DEET is the most effective for exposed skin if you don't want to be covered. Parents should contact their pediatrician regarding the use of insect repellants on children under age 2. Children age 2-12 should use repellents containing 10% or less DEET.

Be on the lookout for symptoms of West Nile: fever, body aches, headaches, skin rash, and swollen lymph glands. More severe infections may cause stiffness of the neck, high fever, stupor, disorientation, tremors, or even coma, paralysis and death. If you or someone you know has these symptoms, contact a doctor.

For more information about West Nile virus, contact your local health department at 636-456-7474 or visit one of these websites:

Warren County Health Department: <http://warren.lphamo.org>

Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services: www.dhss.mo.gov/WestNileVirus

U.S. Center for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile