

Department of Health and Senior Services

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News Releases

West Nile Virus Season is Here: Now is the Time to Take Preventive Health Measures

With the arrival of spring, it's time to take important steps to protect yourself and your family against West Nile Virus (WNV) infection.

WNV is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito, so it's important to take steps to prevent getting mosquito bites and to clean or remove items on your property that can serve as mosquito breeding grounds.

"We've had a wet spring this year, and that provides a perfect environment for mosquitoes and the spread of West Nile virus," said Acting Health and Senior Services Commissioner Mary O'Dowd. "You can reduce your risk of infection by using mosquito repellent, wearing long sleeves and long pants, and limiting outdoor activity when mosquitoes are most active at dawn, dusk and during the evening.

"It's also important to remove or clean anything that can collect rain or sprinkler water – such as clogged gutters, flower pots, bottle caps or old car tires. If you have a birdbath in your yard, remember to change the water at least once a week. Check and repair your window and door screens, as needed," she added.

WNV is an arboviral disease which people can acquire through the bite of a mosquito that has fed on an infected bird. WNV is not directly transmitted from birds to humans. Last year, there were 30 human cases of WNV, including two deaths.

About one in 150 persons, or less than 1 percent of those infected with West Nile virus will develop a more severe form of the disease. Symptoms of more serious illness include severe headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness and paralysis. The elderly are at higher risk of more severe disease.

New Jersey's WNV surveillance, control, and prevention activities involve the coordinated efforts of a number of federal, state and local agencies. These include DHSS, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the State Mosquito Control Commission, the Rutgers Center for Vector Biology, and local health and mosquito control agencies.

For more information on WNV and New Jersey's efforts to limit its impact, visit the DHSS West Nile web page at nj.gov/health/cd/westnile/enceph.htm, the Department of Environmental Protection's web page at nj.gov/dep/mosquito/ or call 1-888-NO-NJ WNV.