

# NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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## **Panhandle mosquitoes tests positive for West Nile Virus**

A Panhandle mosquito pool has recently tested positive for West Nile Virus. This positive pool gives Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) an indicator of the location of the virus and the potential for it to be spread through human contact. Several counties in the Panhandle have been routinely testing sites to trap and monitor mosquitoes over the summer months.

To help reduce the risk of West Nile Virus spread, Melissa Cervantes, Environmental Health Coordinator for PPHD, urges residents to follow these precautions to protect themselves and their families:

- Use a mosquito repellent that contains DEET.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks.
- Take extra precautions when going outdoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- Drain standing water.
- Add larvicides to animal drinking troughs.
- Keep window screens in good repair.

West Nile Virus is contracted through mosquitoes that have bitten an infected bird. Generally birds cannot pass the virus on it is only through the bite of a mosquito that humans can become infected. West Nile includes flu-like symptoms that can include a slight fever and headaches. Severe symptoms of West Nile can lead to encephalitis which can cause inflammation of the brain, disorientation, convulsions and paralysis. People over 50, infants, and pregnant women are especially susceptible to this disease.

The positive mosquito pool indicates that PPHD is no longer accepting dead birds for testing. If you suspect you have a bird that has died of unknown origins related to West Nile, dispose of it by sealing it in a Ziploc bag and throwing it away. Do not touch a bird with your bare hands, use gloves or an inverted bag to handle and dispose of. Birds can still be called in to PPHD to be reported to the state but will not be collected.

If you have any questions regarding birds or West Nile Virus, please call Melissa Cervantes at 308-487-3600 extension 108 or e-mail at [mcervantes@pphd.org](mailto:mcervantes@pphd.org). Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community.