

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Prevent West Nile Virus

June officially brings the start of summer and the beginning of mosquito season. Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) has once again begun West Nile Virus (WNV) surveillance activities to monitor the presence of the virus in the Panhandle.

PPHD will begin the process of mosquito trapping and bird collection to monitor the spread of WNV. Generally most people are infected through the bite of a mosquito that became infected from feeding on a bird with the disease. PPHD strongly encourages any Panhandle resident to report a dead bird if it has appeared to die from unknown causes.

There are certain qualifications a bird must meet to be sent in for testing. A bird found should be fresh; it cannot be deceased for more than 24 hours. It also should have no bite marks, lost limbs, or bullet fragments, birds must be in good condition to be sent in for testing. Common birds such as the morning dove, robin, or sparrow are not testable species. Residents should look for Corvid species of birds. This includes the American crow, black-billed magpie, and blue jay.

Although surveillance efforts are taking place, Panhandle residents are urged to exercise caution when outdoors. To avoid mosquito bites, PPHD recommends:

- Applying mosquito repellent containing DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus;
- Wearing long-sleeved shirt, pants and socks;
- Avoiding going out at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active;
- Eliminating standing water to reduce mosquito breeding sites
- Keep window screens in good repair, and;
- Use larvicides that contain *Bacillus thuringiensis* in standing water that is not easily drainable.

Anyone who suspects they have contracted West Nile Virus can exhibit symptoms like the flu such as fever and muscle weakness. Other symptoms may involve nausea, vomiting, swollen lymph glands, and/or a skin rash on the chest, stomach or back. Those over 50 or with weakened immune systems are most vulnerable to the disease and are more likely to experience serious consequences.

West Nile Virus can have deadly effects on horses. Horse owners, especially kids with 4-H projects, are encouraged to keep their horses up-to-date on their vaccines and ask for the West Nile Virus vaccine specifically. Horses that contract West Nile will exhibit symptoms such as weakness of hind limbs, head pressing, wandering, and convulsions.

To report a dead bird or to request further information on West Nile Virus, please visit www.pphd.org or call 308-487-3600 x108 or toll free 866-701-7173. 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.