

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Prevent West Nile Virus

The increase of rainfall and the arrival of summer weather mean the return of mosquitos. With these mosquitos is the potential for the arrival of West Nile Virus. Panhandle Public Health District has begun West Nile Virus surveillance activities to monitor the presence of the virus in the area.

PPHD is currently testing mosquito samples and dead birds for the virus. West Nile is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird. Environmental Health Coordinator Melissa Cervantes encourages Panhandle residents to report birds that have died of apparent unknown causes.

“Birds must be deceased for less than 24 hours and show no signs of physical trauma or decay in order to be collected for testing,” Cervantes advised. “This year we will be collecting Corvid species only, such as 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, Cervantes 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; and
- Eliminating standing water to reduce mosquito breeding sites.

West Nile fever includes flu-like symptoms 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. West Nile can also cause encephalitis which is the inflammation of the brain, and can cause disorientation, convulsions and paralysis. Those over 50 or with weakened immune systems are most vulnerable to the disease and are more likely to experience serious consequences.

"With the increase in rain, there is more standing water, which means we need to be extra vigilant in our efforts to prevent West Nile," said Cervantes. "It only takes one mosquito bite for you to become infected with West Nile Virus."

Standing water should be drained whenever possible or treated with bacillus thuringensis (BTI) briquettes. Use the briquettes in places where mosquitoes breed such as ponds, bird baths, unused swimming pools, flower pots, rain barrels, old tires, and any other place where water collects. Even items such as wheelbarrows can collect rainwater and breed mosquitos. Making sure to drain areas whenever possible is one key aspect to West Nile prevention.

To report a dead bird, for further information on West Nile Virus or to download an informational podcast on the topic, 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.