

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

June 21, 2014

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Prevent West Nile Virus

With the arrival of sun, summer, barbeques, and evening walks also comes the return of mosquitoes and 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. Environmental Health Coordinator Tabi Prochazka 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," Prochazka advised. "We are collecting only raptors this year. Common raptors, birds of prey, in our area include hawks, falcons and owls."

West Nile is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird. 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. Symptoms of the more serious West Nile encephalitis include inflammation of the brain, 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.

Although surveillance efforts are taking place, Panhandle residents are urged to exercise caution outdoors. "While most people are on alert for mosquitoes at times of high rainfall, it's still important for people to take the necessary precautions to prevent mosquito bites," said Prochazka, "It only takes one mosquito bite for you to become infected with West Nile Virus."

To avoid mosquito bites, Prochazka 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.
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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.

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 x107 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.