



West Nile Virus: Advice for Persons 55 and Older

(Adapted from materials supplied by the New York State Bureau of Health)

Since 1999 when West Nile Virus was first identified in New York City, the virus has spread to 28 other States. To date, there have been one hundred forty-nine cases of severe disease, eighteen of which were fatal, diagnosed nationwide. Persons over the age of 55 are at higher risk for serious illness.

During 2001, with the assistance of Animal Control officers and other participating groups, the Bureau of Health collected over 600 birds; seven of which tested positive for the virus. Virus positive birds were found in Sabattus, South Berwick, and Portland. We expect to see WNV extend to other parts of Maine during the coming summer months.

Although the chances of a person becoming ill are small, there are some simple steps you can take to reduce this risk. The Maine Bureau of Health and other state agencies are working to improve awareness about West Nile Virus. This handout provides the public with information on how to protect themselves and their families from the mosquito born infection.

While it is not necessary to limit any outdoor activities, you can reduce your risk of mosquito bites by adopting the following personal protection measures:

- Avoid being outdoors during peak periods of mosquito activity, such as dawn and dusk.
- Wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt when mosquitoes are most active.
- Consider using a mosquito repellent, according to directions on the label.

CONTROL MOSQUITOES IN AND AROUND YOUR HOME

Many mosquitoes need standing water to lay their eggs. To reduce the mosquito population in and around your home, reduce or eliminate standing water by:

- Disposing of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers.
- Removing all leaf debris and keeping brush trimmed.
- Drilling holes in the bottoms of all recycling containers that are kept outdoors.
- Making sure roof gutters drain properly, and cleaning clogged gutters in the spring and fall.
- Turning over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Changing the water in bird baths and animal dishes frequently.
- Regularly cleaning and chlorinating swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs.
- Draining water from pool covers.
- Using landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property.

The Maine Bureau of Health is using dead bird sightings and laboratory testing of birds to help track West Nile virus. If you see a dead bird, call toll-free: 1-888-697-5846 to report the incident. Although not all birds will be collected and tested, such reports will be used for monitoring the spread of the virus within Maine.

For more information about West Nile virus contact the Bureau of Health, Division of Disease Control at (207) 287-5301 or visit our website at <http://www.state.me.us/dhs/boh/ddc/westnile.htm>