



News Release

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West Nile virus tracking resumes; public asked to report dead birds online

Avoiding mosquito bites the best prevention for West Nile virus infection

OLYMPIA — West Nile virus tracking and monitoring season is underway and an updated online dead bird reporting system is available for state residents to use. Dead birds can be the first sign that West Nile virus is circulating in a community.

“Tracking dead birds and West Nile virus gives people information they need to avoid getting sick,” said Maryanne Guichard, assistant secretary of Environmental Public Health. “Avoiding mosquito bites is the key to preventing West Nile virus. Nationally, last year saw the most reported West Nile virus illnesses since 2003, and it has made a few state residents sick in recent years, but it’s unpredictable. We don’t know how many people may be affected this year.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has just reported final data for [the 2012 season](#), with 5,674 cases of West Nile virus disease in people in 48 states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii). That total includes 286 deaths. Last year in Washington, two people acquired West Nile virus in-state and two more were likely exposed while traveling outside the state; none died.

West Nile virus can cause illness in people, birds, horses, and other mammals if bitten by an infected mosquito. Dead bird monitoring can help provide information on areas where the virus may be active. Washington residents may [report dead birds online](#) now through October. Crows, ravens, jays, magpies, and hawks are particularly important to report because they often die from West Nile virus infection.

Most people bitten by an infected mosquito carrying West Nile virus won’t get sick. Some may develop mild symptoms such as fever or headache that go away without treatment. People with weak immune systems and those over 50 years old are more likely to develop serious illness,

which may include meningitis or encephalitis. Some neurological effects can be permanent. West Nile virus disease can be fatal.

Small changes to the way we do things helps defend against West Nile virus. Staying indoors during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active can help you avoid mosquito bites. Wearing long sleeves and long pants outdoors during these times is also good protection. Make sure window and door screens are “bug tight,” or replace them — especially torn screens. Use an effective mosquito repellent on exposed skin to keep mosquitoes away. When using repellent on children, read the label and follow the instructions carefully.

Removing items around your home that can become mosquito habitat can help you avoid mosquito bites. Mosquitoes only need a small amount of water for breeding. Emptying stagnant water in flower pots, old tires, buckets, and other water-collecting items, can make it harder for mosquito larvae to grow into biting adults. Change water in birdbaths, animal troughs, and wading pools twice a week.

The online reporting system is active now. People without online access can [contact their local health agency](#) to report dead birds. Regular updates are available on the agency’s West Nile virus information line, 1-866-78-VIRUS (1-866-788-4787) and the West Nile virus website.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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