

West Nile Virus Detected in Maryland Resident, Birds and Mosquitoes

Findings are first of the year

Marylanders reminded that simple steps can reduce risk

BALTIMORE, MD (August 18, 2011) – The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) today announced that a Baltimore metropolitan area adult is the State's first confirmed case of symptomatic West Nile virus (WNV) infection in 2011.

"Because West Nile Virus is endemic to Maryland, it is expected to see cases every year," said DHMH Secretary Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein. "These findings remind us that there are some basic actions we can all take to reduce our risk of getting infected."

Measures people can take to protect themselves include:

- **Avoid areas of high mosquito infestation**
- **Avoid unnecessary outdoor activities at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active**
- **Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts and hats when concerned about mosquito exposure**
- **Using mosquito repellants according to directions**

Most individuals infected with West Nile virus will not have any symptoms. People that do develop illness will usually have any combination of: fever, headache, body aches, skin rash and swollen lymph glands. These symptoms generally appear three to 15 days following the bite of an infective mosquito. Less than one percent of persons exposed to the virus will develop more severe infections with symptoms such as headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness and paralysis. In rare instances, WNV can be fatal. Persons over 50 years of age and those who are immunocompromised have the highest risk of developing more severe disease.

The number of human WNV cases in Maryland has varied widely over the past several years. Seventy-three human WNV cases were reported in the peak year of 2003. Only one confirmed case was identified in 2009. Last year, 23 human WNV cases were identified.

West Nile virus activity has also recently been detected in mosquitoes and birds in Maryland. Three pools of mosquitoes collected in Montgomery County by the U.S. Department of Defense tested positive for WNV infection. A mosquito pool is a group of mosquitoes collected at selected trap sites across the State. In addition, although birds are no longer routinely tested for WNV since the virus is known to infect birds, three sick birds from a Montgomery County wildlife center also recently tested positive for WNV infection.

Residents are urged to monitor their own yards and gardens for standing water that can serve as a breeding ground for mosquitoes. As little as one-half inch of water in a discarded can or container will support dozens of mosquitoes.

To eliminate mosquito-breeding areas:

- **Clean rain gutters to allow water to flow freely**
- **Remove old tires or drill drainage holes in tires used as playground equipment**
- **Turn over wading pools, wheelbarrows, wagons and carts when not in use. Flush water from bottom of plant holders twice a week**
- **Replace water in birdbaths at least twice a week**
- **Turn garbage can lids upside down and make sure trash receptacles are empty of water**
- **Fix dripping faucets**
- **Aerate ornamental pools and water gardens or stock with fish and use a circulating filter system**

Although birds are not routinely tested for WNV in Maryland, sick or injured birds can be reported to an appropriate local wildlife rehabilitator. Residents can call [1-877-463-6497](tel:1-877-463-6497) for a list of licensed rehabilitators or visit the Maryland Department of Natural Resources web site at <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/rehab.asp> . Detailed instructions on what to do when you find a sick or dead bird can be found at: http://ideha.dhmh.maryland.gov/CZVBD/west-nile_callctr.aspx.

General information on West Nile virus can be found online at the following web sites:

- Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: www.dhmh.maryland.gov
 - Click on Disease Awareness to access the West Nile Virus page
- Maryland Department of Agriculture: <http://www.mda.state.md.us/>
 - Click on Plants/Pests to access the Mosquito Control page
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
 - Click on Diseases and Conditions