



**LIVINGSTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION**

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West Nile Virus Fact Sheet, April 2004

West Nile Virus and Birds

How are birds involved in the transmission of the West Nile Virus?

Birds become infected through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can transmit West Nile Virus to humans.

What is the significance of dead birds?

Corvid species (crows, blue jays and ravens) appear to be more at risk for WNV infection, and therefore, are used to measure the risk of WNV infection in humans and other animals. In 2000, the number of dead birds found in a county was strongly associated with areas of increased West Nile Virus activity. However, since birds can die of many different causes, finding one or more dead birds does not necessarily mean that the virus is present in that bird or in that area. Therefore, it is extremely important that all dead birds be reported to the State of Michigan website at www.michigan.gov/westnilevirus, so that the Livingston County Department of Public Health can evaluate whether there is evidence of West Nile Virus in the county.

Can I get West Nile Virus from an infected bird?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that people can become infected through contact with an infected bird. However, because birds can carry other diseases that can be acquired by people, it is best to minimize contact with sick or dead wild birds, and have sick pet birds evaluated promptly by a veterinarian.

Is the virus transmittable if you handle a bird that died from WNV with bare hands?

Again, there is currently no evidence to suggest that people can become infected through contact with an infected bird. However, it is recommended that gloves or other protective wear be worn when handling dead animals in general. This is for basic sanitary reasons as flies and other insects quickly start the decomposition process on any dead animal and can transmit other diseases. The WNV resides within the blood of the bird, which is why mosquitoes can transmit the disease. Blood and other body fluids are the first to decompose which quickly leads to a non-conducive environment for the virus to survive in.

If I see a dead bird, what should I do?

Report all dead bird sightings within the county, especially crows, blue jays and ravens (see next question). This will assist us in our efforts to monitor possible WNV activity. However, while every report is important to our monitoring efforts, we will be collecting only a sample of the dead birds and not every dead bird reported. If you do not receive a phone call from LCDPH to arrange pick up of the dead bird within 2

business days of making the report, please dispose of the dead bird. Use gloves to carefully place dead birds in double-plastic bags and then place it in the outdoor trash.

How do I report a dead bird?

LCDPH encourages the reporting of all dead bird sightings. Any individual may report a dead bird by one of the following means:

- Call the Livingston County Department of Public Health directly at **517.546.9858**.
- Use the State of Michigan's **Web-Based Reporting System** at www.michigan.gov/westnilevirus.

How do I dispose of a dead bird?

As dead birds can carry a variety of diseases, they should never be handled with bare hands. Be sure to handle dead birds with disposable gloves or other protective barriers for sanitary reasons. To dispose of the bird, either bury the bird to a depth that other animals won't dig it up, or place the bird in a double plastic bag, then tie off the bag and place it in the outdoor trash.

Where did West Nile Virus come from?

Outbreaks of West Nile Virus have occurred in Africa, Egypt, Israel, Asia, Romania, Russia and France. Before 1999, however, West Nile Virus had never before been found in the Americas. The most likely explanation for its appearance here is that the virus was introduced by an infected bird that was imported or an infected person returning from a country where the virus is common.

What is the Livingston County doing to address the problem of West Nile Virus?

The Livingston County Department of Public Health has developed a West Nile Virus Action Plan for 2003. The key to our action plan is an emphasis on prevention and surveillance. Resources will be devoted to a county-wide effort to prevent mosquito breeding, improve disease surveillance capabilities and conduct a public education campaign. Our objective is to prevent disease caused by mosquitoes through public education, targeting strong personal protective measures, and early and aggressive source reduction. In addition, information on mosquito control alternatives will be made available to local municipalities to assist them in deciding on the best approach for their jurisdiction. The main components of the 2003 West Nile Virus Action Plan include: public education and community outreach, disease surveillance in animals, mosquito surveillance, human surveillance and provider education, larval mosquito control and adult mosquito control.

For more information about West Nile Virus, call the Livingston County Department of Public Health at 517.546.9858, Monday-Friday during business hours, or check our website at www.lchd.org.

This fact sheet includes materials provided through the courtesy of the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene and the Washtenaw County Environmental Health Department.