



State of Wisconsin  
**Department of Health Services**

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Jim Doyle, Governor  
Karen E. Timberlake, Secretary

**For Immediate Release**

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## **First Birds Test Positive for West Nile Virus**

State and county health officials announce that two birds have tested positive for West Nile virus, one in Milwaukee County and the other in Portage County. These are the first animals to test positive for the virus in Wisconsin this year. Although very few mosquitoes actually carry West Nile virus, birds act as an early warning by indicating the virus is present in the area and people should be more vigilant in protecting themselves against mosquito bites.

West Nile virus is spread to people and horses through the bite of an infected mosquito and people *must* be bitten by an infected mosquito in order to contract the virus. Mosquitoes become infected with West Nile virus by feeding on infected birds, then potentially transmit the virus by biting other animals or people.

Below are some measures to help decrease your exposure to mosquitoes and prevent West Nile virus infection:

- Limit time spent outside at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Apply insect repellent to clothing as well as exposed skin since mosquitoes may bite through clothing.
- Make sure window and door screens are in good repair to prevent mosquito entry.
- Properly dispose of items that hold water such as tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots, or discarded tires.
- Clean roof gutters and downspouts for proper drainage.
- Turn over wheelbarrows, wading pools, boats, and canoes when not in use.
- Change the water in birdbaths and pet dishes at least every three days.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas, and hot tubs; drain water from pool covers.
- Trim tall grass, weeds, and vines since mosquitoes use these areas to rest during hot daylight hours.
- Landscape to prevent water from pooling in low-lying areas.

The chances of a person becoming infected with the West Nile virus are very low and most infected people will not have any symptoms. Those who do become ill typically develop a fever, headache, and rash that lasts a few days. Symptoms may begin between three to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Children, older adults and people with compromised immune systems are at an increased risk of severe disease from the virus. There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus other than to treat symptoms. If you think you have a West Nile virus infection, contact your healthcare provider.

Statewide surveillance activities for West Nile virus began on May 1<sup>st</sup>. People who find a dead bird in their yard or who have a question about a dead bird should call the Dead Bird Reporting Hotline at 1-800-433-1610. Horse owners should contact their veterinarian to get their horse vaccinated or if they suspect their horse is ill with West Nile virus infection.

The Department of Health Services has monitored the spread of West Nile virus since 2001 among wild birds, horses, mosquitoes, and people. In 2002, the state documented its first human infections with 52 human cases. In 2008, there were eight human cases of West Nile virus. For more information on West Nile virus, go to <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/westNilevirus/>

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