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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2013 West Nile Virus Season Surveillance Begins in Winnebago County

Health Department offers tips to families on protection from mosquito-borne illnesses.

The onset of warmer weather and spring rain means Winnebago County residents should start noticing increased mosquito activity in our community, though it is still too early to know what amount of West Nile virus (WNV) activity we will have in our community this season.

Above normal temperatures can increase the rate of *Culex* mosquito production, mosquito flight activity and virus replication, thereby increasing the proportion of birds and mosquitoes infected with WNV and the risk of disease to humans.

The best way to prevent West Nile virus or any other mosquito-borne illness is to reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home and to take personal precautions to avoid mosquito bites. Precautions include practicing the three “R’s” – reduce, repel and report.

- **REDUCE** exposure - avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are most active, especially between dusk and dawn.
 - Make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or other openings. Try to keep doors and windows shut, especially at night.
 - Eliminate all sources of standing water where mosquitoes can breed, including water in bird baths, ponds, flowerpots, wading pools, old tires and any other receptacles.
- **REPEL** - when outdoors, wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, and apply insect repellent that contains DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR 3535, according to label instructions. Consult a physician before using repellents on infants.

Next Page

- **REPORT** - “Every WNV season, the Winnebago County Health Department offers a phone line for residents to report the location of recently expired birds” said, WNV Program Manager, Todd Marshall. The report line number to call is 815- 720-4245. After calling in a report of a dead bird, you can dispose of the bird yourself, or leave it where it lay, if not picked up for testing within 24 hours of your call,” added Todd. When calling the hotline to report dead birds, please leave the address, town, Zip Code, type and number of dead birds found.

Dead birds cannot spread West Nile virus, but it is advised to avoid barehanded contact with dead birds and other animals since they carry a variety of germs. Please use a shovel, gloves or double-plastic bags to place the carcass in garbage bag or can” added Todd Marshall. The Health Department has also opened a West Nile virus Information line for residents who have questions or wish to speak to a health professional. That number is 815-720-4240.

WNV is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird. West Nile virus is an infection that can cause serious illness, but most people infected with WNV have no signs or symptoms of illness. Most people with the virus have no clinical symptoms of illness, but some may become ill three to 15 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. Those with mild symptoms may have a fever, headache, body aches, skin rash or swollen lymph glands, but those with serious symptoms such as encephalitis and meningitis should seek medical help right away as death can possibly occur. Persons at the highest risk for serious illness are those 50 years of age or older.

Based on nationwide experience in Illinois over the previous 11 years of WNV presence in the United States, the peak period for WNV transmission, particularly to humans, has been from mid-July through the middle of October.

In the summer of 2012, Winnebago County Health Department received 396 calls from the general public with questions on West Nile virus and dead bird reports. Those calls resulted in 75 birds tested, with 30 being confirmed as positive. 95 mosquito pools were collected with 13 testing positive with WNV. Three confirmed human cases with West Nile virus were reported.

For more information on West Nile virus visit the following websites:

Illinois Department of Public Health at www.idph.state.il.us

Center for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov.ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm

Winnebago County Health Department at www.wchd.org

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