

Health Unit Media Release

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For Immediate Release



Contact: Ms. Jane Lyster, Director of Health Protection (613) 345-5685 and 1-800-660-5853

DEAD CROW FOUND IN THE MERRICKVILLE AREA IS POSITIVE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS

The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit was notified today that a dead crow found in the Merrickville area was positive for West Nile virus. **This is the first positive bird found this year within the tri-county area. In 2004 there was one positive bird.**

To date in 2005 there have been eight human cases reported in Ontario. Twelve health units in Ontario have positive mosquito pools. At present 119 birds have tested positive for West Nile virus in Ontario.

Jane Lyster, Director of Health Protection with the Leeds Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit states that: "although this is the first positive bird found in the tri-county area, the risk of contracting West Nile Virus disease locally remains low. Results of weekly mosquito testing throughout the Health Unit have been negative for the virus. **Regardless of the risk, positive birds and mosquito pools have been found throughout Ontario, which indicates the virus is still with us and urges prudence in avoiding being bitten by mosquitoes**".

The Health Unit will continue the monitoring for West Nile virus activity through the submission of dead crows or blue jays. The Health Unit would like to thank the public for their assistance in reporting dead birds. Municipalities are providing support with our monitoring for this virus by trapping mosquitoes in many pre-selected areas. These trapped mosquitoes are then tested for the presence of the virus.

West Nile virus is spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes get the virus by feeding on infected birds. The virus is not transmitted from person to person or from bird to person directly.

While the risk of contracting serious illness from West Nile virus is low, the public can take precautions to protect themselves against mosquito bites by:

- **Avoiding areas with high mosquito populations.**
- **Wearing light-coloured clothing, including long sleeves, pants and hat, to cover exposed skin.**

- **Using a mosquito repellent containing DEET. For adults, look for repellents containing 30 per cent DEET or less. Children should wear a repellent with no more than six to 10 per cent DEET. Children under 6 months of age should not use DEET, those six months to two years of age should apply DEET only once per day, and those two to 12 years of age should not apply DEET more than three times per day. Prolonged use of DEET should be avoided.**
- **Making sure all windows and doors in your home have screens that are in good condition.**
- **Taking extra precautions from dusk to dawn when mosquito activity is particularly high.**

Citizens are also encouraged to reduce mosquito-breeding areas on their properties by:

- **Draining any area of standing water or stagnant water on your property.**
- **Removing old tires, turning over pails, toys and wheelbarrows and changing birdbath water frequently.**
- **Keeping your eavestroughs clear to avoid trapping water.**

Further information on West Nile virus, tips to reduce mosquito breeding areas, personal protection from mosquito bites and details on how to report dead birds can be found at www.healthunit.org/westnile or calling the Health Unit's Health Action Line during business hours at 1-800-660-5853.

If you find a dead crow or bluejay within the Counties of Leeds, Grenville and Lanark, please call the Health Unit at the following numbers: Brockville area 345-5685 or Smiths Falls at 283-2740.

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