

Health Unit Media Release

For Immediate Release: June 25, 2007



Preventing West Nile Virus Infections

As summer begins and mosquitoes become more abundant, the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit would like to remind the people about preventing WNV infections.

The mosquito surveillance program began on June 18th, 2007. Trapping and testing of mosquitoes will continue for fourteen weeks. Should you see one of our traps in your neighbourhood, please do not disturb it. These traps are not mosquito control units, so they have no value to property owners, but they are important in identifying mosquitoes and providing a warning that disease causing mosquitoes are present in a given area.

We all play a role in preventing West Nile Virus infections, and when we all do our part we will reduce the risk of this disease in our community.

Each homeowner has the responsibility of removing standing water that provides breeding areas for mosquitoes from their property. Most mosquitoes do not travel large distances and thus those breeding within your space are likely to bite you. Protecting yourself from bites by wearing light coloured clothing and applying insect repellents containing the appropriate concentrations of Deet is also recommended.

The municipality is charged with the responsibility of ensuring proper drainage on municipally owned lands and public ditches. The roads departments have the knowledgeable staff and proper equipment to ensure this is achieved. Additionally it is a municipal responsibility to address complaints regarding standing water on private land within its jurisdiction, using applicable property standards bylaws. Should positive mosquito pools be identified in a municipality, it is also the responsibility of council to take the necessary control actions as recommended by the Medical Officer of Health.

The health unit has the responsibility of assessing the risk for WNV within the three counties each year. This is accomplished by means of surveillance during the warm months, including testing of dead birds and mosquitoes for the virus. The presence of virus in these natural hosts is an early sign that the virus is gaining a presence in an area. The health unit is also responsible for following up any human cases of diseases and, more importantly, trying to prevent human cases by educating the public on strategies that reduce mosquito breeding and the resulting human bites.

Individuals have the responsibility to protect themselves from mosquito bites by avoiding areas with high mosquito populations, wearing light-coloured clothing, including long sleeves, pants and hat, to cover exposed skin and using a mosquito repellent containing the appropriate amount of DEET.

To date our area has been fortunate to be a low risk area. However, we may not always be so lucky, so each of us should be prepared for our responsibilities every summer.