

Health Department Releases 2003 West Nile Virus Plan; Makes Dead Bird Reporting Available On Web Site

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The Kent County Health Department today released its 2003 West Nile Virus Action Plan and Recommendations as West Michigan prepares for the 2003 WNV season. The three-pronged plan - which focuses on public education, surveillance, and mosquito control - is designed to help individuals lower their risk of WNV infection, and to allow health officials to monitor WNV indicators in the community and make appropriate recommendations for environmental controls.

Highlights of the plan include:

- A comprehensive public education campaign that utilizes mass media, community-level educational presentations, the World Wide Web, and targeted health alerts for health care providers. Community education will emphasize personal protection (insect repellent and other measures) and actions individuals can take in and around their homes to reduce mosquito breeding habitats.
- Active surveillance and mapping of dead birds, human cases, and mosquitoes. Surveillance data from 1999-2002 has shown that the peak of dead bird reports tends to precede the first human cases of WNV by approximately two to three weeks. To enhance active and timely surveillance, County residents can report finding a dead bird through the Health Department's WNV web site.
- Recommendations for locally-based mosquito control programs that include surveillance and larvaciding in identified breeding habitats. The Health Department has contracted with an environmental consulting firm to provide training in larvacide programs and will work with local units of government to implement control programs as needed.

In addition to the WNV Action Plan, the Health Department has launched a West Nile Virus web site where County residents can report finding a dead bird. Last year the Health Department received nearly 4,000 citizen reports of dead birds in Kent County, and dead bird densities have been shown to be related to potential human cases of West Nile Virus. The web site also contains basic information about WNV, links to WNV resources on the web, Health Department news releases, and the Department's WNV report that was released in February of this year. Copies of the 2003 WNV Action Plan are available on the site as well; the address is www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthDepartment/WestNile.

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