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**HEALTH DEPARTMENT RELEASES 2004 WEST NILE VIRUS PLAN;  
REMINDS CITIZENS TO REPORT DEAD BIRDS**

The Kent County Health Department today released its 2004 West Nile Virus (WNV) Action Plan and Recommendations as West Michigan prepares for the 2004 WNV season. Like last year's plan, the 2004 Action Plan focuses on three areas -- public education, surveillance, and mosquito control -- to help individuals lower their risk of West Nile Virus infection and to allow Health Department officials to monitor WNV indicators in the community.

West Nile Virus is now considered endemic in the United States and some level of WNV infection – in mosquitoes, birds, and humans – can be expected every year. Accordingly, recognized strategies to limit individual exposure to mosquitoes and reduce mosquito habitat should become routine during mosquito season.

Dead bird surveillance is a known indicator of West Nile Virus activity, and dead bird densities can help predict the potential for human infections. For this reason, the Health Department is again asking Kent County residents to report any dead birds they might find. All dead bird reports are mapped to identify potential 'hot spots' of WNV activity. People can report a dead bird via the Health Department's WNV web site at [www.accesskent.com/westnile](http://www.accesskent.com/westnile), or by calling the Health Department at (616) 632-7100. While it is not necessary to know the exact location of the bird, people will be asked to report the nearest cross streets. People can also report a dead bird directly to the state at [www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases](http://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases) by selecting the "West Nile Virus" link.

The Health Department will also be offering educational presentations about West Nile Virus. In 2003, the Health Department provided over 60 presentations to a combined audience of over 1,500 people from schools, churches, employers, and neighborhood associations. The free presentations are available to groups of 10 or more throughout the summer by calling the Health Department at (616) 336-8797.

The Health Department's West Nile Virus web site is an excellent resource for information about the disease. In addition to the 2004 Action Plan, the site contains fact sheets, an online slideshow presentation, current Health Department WNV news releases, and links to other WNV sites. The address is [www.accesskent.com/westnile](http://www.accesskent.com/westnile).

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