

Update: West Nile Virus Surveillance Activity in Kent County

For Immediate Release

August 9, 2002

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The Kent County Health Department is continuing its surveillance of West Nile Virus activity in Kent County, in accordance with U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines on control of the virus, mapping citizen reports of dead crows and other birds, and notifying area health care providers to be aware of the possibility of human cases of West Nile Virus.

According to the CDC, detection of dead birds infected with West Nile Virus has been associated with an increased likelihood of human cases. To date, seven dead crows from Kent County have been identified as infected with West Nile Virus (the most recent positive crows were already being tested while test results from the first infected crow [Health Department news release 7/31/02] were still pending).

The Health Department also continues to take and map citizen reports of dead crows and other birds found in the County. As of August 8, over 600 reports of dead birds have been received, however, mapping the locations of the reported birds has not so far revealed any geographical clusters. People should avoid touching any dead bird with their bare hands and instead use a shovel to remove the bird, and use work gloves or rubber gloves to cover their hands; dead birds can be disposed of by burying them, or placing them in a sealed plastic trash bag in the garbage. People should also wash their hands after having any such contact. People can report a dead bird by calling the Health Department at (616) 632-7100.

On Wednesday, August 7, the Kent County Health Department sent a notice to approximately 180 local health care providers advising them to be aware of the possibility of human cases of West Nile Virus. According to the CDC, counties with human cases have tended to have high dead bird surveillance indices, and in 1999-2000, the peak human risk for West Nile Virus infection occurred in mid to late August. Health officials continue to emphasize that the risk of infection remains very low, but that individuals can reduce their potential risk of infection by reducing their exposure to mosquitoes.

Toward that end, the Health Department is building capacity to begin limited mosquito surveillance and has received five mosquito traps from the Michigan Department of Agriculture. After trapping the mosquitoes, the bugs must be separated by species and sex, and those of the *Culex pipiens* variety tested for infection with West Nile Virus. Health officials point out that mosquito surveillance has never been done in Kent County, and the process may require some weeks to become implemented.