

Five Confirmed New Cases of West Nile Virus in Kent County

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Five Confirmed New Cases of West Nile Virus in Kent County; Health Department Leads Surveillance Activities

The Michigan Department of Community Health today confirmed five new cases of West Nile Virus in Kent County, bringing the total of confirmed cases to six. The confirmed cases reported today include:

a 39 year old male;

a 54 year old male;

an 18 year old male;

a 37 year old female;

a 36 year old male

The first confirmed case, a 55 year old male, was announced Tuesday, August 28.

The Kent County Health Department is continuing to lead West Nile Virus surveillance activities in Kent County, tracking reports of dead birds, trapping and testing mosquitoes, and advising the local health care and veterinary communities on potential human and animal cases of the virus. The Michigan Department of Community Health on Tuesday confirmed the first human case of West Nile Virus in Kent County, and yesterday reported three more suspect cases in Kent County.

Kent County health officials say they had been anticipating human cases of West Nile Virus given the level of virus activity in the County. The first report of a dead crow infected with WNV in Kent County was July 31; since that time at least nine other birds from Kent County have been tested and found to be infected with the virus. In addition, the Health Department has received nearly 3,000 citizen reports of dead birds in the County.

The Kent County Health Department has begun trapping mosquitoes, identifying and testing Culex pippien variety - the species most likely to carry WNV -- and has found mosquitoes infected with West Nile Virus in several areas. Health officials note that mosquito populations in general tend to increase following rains, and decrease as weather dries out and sources of standing water evaporate. Most - though not all -- mosquitoes and their larvae are killed following the first frost. In addition, the Health Department has issued advisories to local health care providers and veterinarians to be aware of the potential for WNV infection in humans, as well as in horses and other livestock.

West Nile Virus is spread by infected mosquitoes and can produce a range of symptoms in humans. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most (human) infections are mild, with symptoms including fever, headache, and body aches, occasionally with skin rash and swollen lymph glands. More severe infection may be marked by headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis, and, rarely, death. While persons 50 and over have the highest risk of severe disease, many people infected with West Nile Virus have no symptoms at all and may not even know they are infected. An infected person cannot transmit the virus to other people.

Health officials say that because West Nile Virus is transmitted by mosquitoes, reducing personal exposure to mosquitoes is the most effective way of minimizing the potential risks of West Nile Virus infection. The Michigan Department of Community Health and CDC recommend the following:

Stay indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening, when mosquitoes are active.

Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors, but especially in wooded or wetland areas.

Use insect repellent. Spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or DEET since mosquitoes may bite through thin clothing. Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. An effective repellent will contain 35% DEET. DEET in high concentrations (greater than 35%) provides no additional protection. Repellents may irritate the eyes and mouth, so avoid applying repellent to the hands of children. Whenever you use an insecticide or insect repellent, be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's Direction for Use, as printed on the product. Note: Vitamin B and "ultrasonic" devices are generally not effective in preventing mosquito bites.

Make sure window and door screens are maintained in good condition to keep mosquitoes out of buildings and homes.

Drain standing water in the yard. Flower pots, pet bowls, clogged rain gutters, swimming pool covers, discarded tires, buckets - anything that can hold standing water - is a site in which mosquitoes can lay eggs.

Avoid activities in areas where large numbers of mosquitoes are present.

Additional information on West Nile Virus can be found on the Kent County Health Department web site at www.accesskent.com/health.