

Communication Activities Plan

I. Introduction

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) considers West Nile Virus (WNV) a threat to public health. West Nile virus was first confirmed in seven crows in Virginia in 2000. Since that time it has become more widespread and prevalent and resulted in 29 human cases in 2002. Public awareness and prevention education are two important components of reducing the potential threat to public health and safety in the Commonwealth. Communications strategies are needed to help the public reduce outdoor water sources where mosquitoes breed and to help people reduce their risk of being bitten by mosquitoes. Additional strategies are needed to educate health care providers about the virus and the prevention of disease and about the diagnosis and treatment of encephalitis in humans. Also, there exists a need to provide information emphasizing the role of county and municipal mosquito control plans, as well as recommendations for developing such a plan, for localities and municipal governments. Should pesticide spraying become necessary in areas that have not traditionally had experience with spraying, public education on the safety of such products will be required.

II. Objective

To provide an appropriate protocol for informing and educating local, state and federal government agencies, the media, and the public.

III. Implementation Plan

A. General

The VDH including its local health departments across the state will work in collaboration with the Virginia Departments of Game and Inland Fisheries; Emergency Management; Conservation and Recreation; Environmental Quality; and Agriculture and Consumer Services; and local governments and mosquito control authorities. Working together the agencies will advise the public and health care providers of potential and actual threats to their health through a multi-level information campaign about West Nile virus and encephalitis. Sample news releases, flier, brochures and fact sheet (Attachments [5.A](#), 5.B, [5.C](#), 5.D) will be distributed.

B. Notification and Release of Information

Rapid sharing of surveillance results with government agencies and the public is essential for development of appropriate disease prevention and control measures. VDH will maintain the same level of confidentiality for human cases that it does for all other reportable disease cases. However, some confidentiality should attach to identification of affected privately owned animals to assure individual privacy of the owner and the treating veterinarian, if any. Therefore, to encourage

reporting, owners' names and street addresses, treating veterinarians' names and street addresses, and names and addresses of persons submitting specimens shall be kept confidential. Information that will be available to agencies and the public with respect to privately owned animals will include the town and county where the specimen was collected, the species, the date of collection, and the WNV test results.

VDH Office of Epidemiology will inform Local Health Departments (LHD) of positive human, avian and mammal laboratory results from their respective jurisdictions. The LHD is responsible for releasing information on positive human and avian cases to physicians caring for human cases, citizens or organizations that submitted positive birds, and the media. VDACS will notify Office of Epidemiology and submitting veterinarians and/or animal owners and will work with the Office of Epidemiology and the involved LHD to notify local government, the media, and the public. Initial announcement of positive/probable cases will originate from the LHD. However, in the event that such information has not been released to the media within 48 hours of receipt of the report, the VDH may and will provide this information directly to the media. Neither the LHD nor VDH will release information about human cases of WNV prior to confirming that the patient and the physician have been informed. All probable and confirmed human cases will be considered releasable information.

C. Activities

1. Winter, spring; no current WNV activity

- a. VDH prepares a pre-mosquito season information campaign to educate the public about West Nile virus, mosquito control and personal protection. (using press release, public service announcement, educational materials and possibly speaking opportunities)
- b. VDH updates information about arboviruses and WNV on the VDH website.
- c. VDH distributes news release to all media in Virginia about WNV, preventing mosquito breeding around the home, and protecting people.
- d. Office of Epidemiology and DCLS develop information for health care providers about WNV symptoms and criteria for laboratory testing and submitting specimens.

- e. VDH coordinates with other agency public relations (PR) staff members and with the Metropolitan Washington Council on Governments on the public awareness campaign.
- f. Office of Epidemiology updates and supplies brochures, fact sheets, and fliers for LHDs to send out to community organizations to distribute/post.
- g. VDH publishes [article in Virginia Municipal League's](#) periodical about developing mosquito control plans, targeting municipal governments.

2. Spring, summer, fall; limited WNV epizootic activity in birds and/or mosquitoes

- a. VDH continues statewide information campaign on how to protect people, reduce mosquitoes, detect WNV symptoms and report dead birds. Follow-up interviews are conducted.
- b. LHDs inform health care providers about WNV symptoms.
- c. LHDs send out news releases and do media follow-up calls and interviews on the increased mosquito threat that warmer weather brings, how to protect yourself from all arboviruses, and on reporting of dead birds.
- d. LHDs develop communications plan for potential West Nile virus cases in the area.
- e. Each state agency represented on the task force reminds appropriate staff on handling calls and emergency procedures for WNV.
- f. Office of Epidemiology PIO obtains news clippings of West Nile Virus stories in Virginia provides periodic analysis of quantity and quality.
- g. State agency communications staff create and distribute appropriate news releases on WNV pertaining to that agency's area of expertise.

3. **Spring, summer fall; areas with initial confirmation of WNV in a horse or human, or escalating WNV activity in birds and/or mosquitoes**
 - a. LHD advises local media immediately of confirmed human case(s) by press release.
 - b. LHD notifies OE PIO immediately of media release.
 - c. VDH sends “story idea” sheet to all media in Virginia suggesting mosquito prevention and personal protection stories; includes information about other forms of encephalitis.
 - d. LHDs contact local broadcast stations (TV & radio) to set up local media interviews. Encourage prevention and protection.
 - e. Office of Epidemiology updates VDH web site. West Nile Virus is placed on first page of site.
 - f. PIO notifies other state agency PR/Communications staff.
4. **Human disease outbreak**
 - a. VDH, working with Virginia Department of Emergency Services (VDES), considers need for a possible state/local Joint Information Center and puts emergency communications procedures into place.
 - b. VDH and LHDs collaborate on plans for communication with the public.
 - c. VDH conducts follow-up interviews.
 - d. If fogging via truck or air is recommended in areas not routinely doing adulticiding, VDH or LHD with assistance from the Office of Epidemiology distributes news releases on the effects of chemicals to be used and the proposed treatment areas.
 - e. Office of Epidemiology updates VDH web site.
 - f. Affected Local Health Directors hold local news conferences with assistance from PIO staff.
 - g. LHDs affected are assisted by PIO in tailoring of sample news releases and in conducting interviews.

- h. VDH Central Office and the VDES work with LHDs to set up local hotlines for public inquiries about possible spraying and schedules.
- i. Statewide toll-free telephone number is considered.
- j. VDACS notifies beekeepers of spraying information.

IV. Evaluation

After frost, involved state agencies and LHDs evaluate success of information activities and WNV media coverage. A summary of this evaluation will be made available to LHD's and other agencies.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[date]

For More Information Contact

[contact name and number]

[name of health district] ANNOUNCES WEST NILE VIRUS POSITIVE [bird species] FOUND IN [location]

([location], Va.)—[Title, name and credentials of Health Director], announced today that a dead [bird species] found in [location] has been confirmed to have West Nile virus. This is the [number] positive bird to be found in [location] this year.

“People need pay special attention to eliminating mosquito breeding areas around the home and protecting themselves from mosquito bites while outside this spring and summer. We are expecting an increase in West Nile virus in birds and mosquitoes this year, which will increase the risk of human infection,” [spokesperson name] said.

(No or the number of) human cases of West Nile virus have been confirmed in Virginia, (but or and) human cases were confirmed in Maryland last year. In 2001, 215 birds, 6 horses, 1 mosquito pool and 1 chicken in a sentinel flock tested positive for West Nile virus in Virginia. West Nile virus was first detected in Virginia in the fall of 2000.

The West Nile virus positive crow was found in [more exact location] on [date]. The state’s Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services in Richmond confirmed it on [date]. “[quote here about local area response to West Nile virus],” [name of spokesperson] said.

People can prevent mosquitoes from breeding by turning over or removing containers around the home where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, buckets and toys. People also should clean birdbaths and wading pools once a week, clean roof gutters and downspout screens regularly, and eliminate standing water on flat roofs.

West Nile virus is spread to birds, humans, horses and other mammals through the bite of an infected mosquito. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito do not get sick. People who do get sick usually suffer a mild flu-like illness. People over age 50 are at greatest risk of serious illness, such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

The Virginia Department of Health recommends the following tips to reduce exposure to mosquitoes:

- Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.
- Use insect repellent products with no more than 35 percent DEET for adults and less than 10 percent for children. Follow instructions when using insect repellents.
- Turn over or remove containers in your yard where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, buckets and toys.
- Eliminate standing water on tarps or flat roofs.
- Clean out birdbaths and wading pools once a week.
- Clean roof gutters and downspout screens regularly.

For more information on West Nile virus, log onto the Virginia Department of Health’s Web site at www.vdh.state.va.us, and click onto “West Nile Virus Update.”

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AVOID MOSQUITOES

PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY



Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.



If possible, stay indoors when mosquitoes are biting.



Use insect repellent products with the smallest percentage of DEET necessary for the amount of time you are exposed to mosquitoes, but no more than 50% for adults and 10% for children under 12. Adults should apply repellent on children.



Spray repellent on your hands and then apply to your face.



Only apply repellent to exposed skin and clothing. Do not use repellent under clothing.



Do not apply repellent over cuts, wounds, sunburn, or irritated skin.



Wash repellent off daily and reapply as needed.

PREVENT MOSQUITOES FROM BREEDING



Turn over or remove containers in your yard where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, boats, buckets and toys.



Clean out birdbaths and wading pools once a week.



Clean roof gutters and downspout screens regularly.



Eliminate standing water on tarps and flat roofs.



Do not leave garbage can lids upside down or allow water to collect in your garbage can.



Make sure all window screens are in good repair without holes in them.

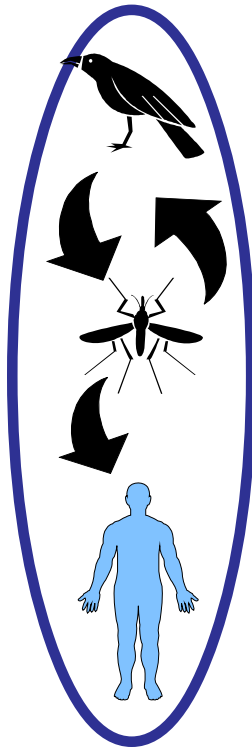
**Mosquitoes may carry potentially dangerous viruses,
such as West Nile virus.**

WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS ?

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne virus that can cause encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) in humans and other animals. The virus is named after the West Nile region of Uganda where it was first isolated in 1937. The virus appeared for the first time in the United States during a 1999 outbreak in New York that killed seven people. The first human case of the virus in Virginia appeared in 2002.

HOW IS WEST NILE VIRUS SPREAD ?

West Nile virus is almost always spread to humans, birds and other animals through the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that is carrying the virus. West Nile virus is not spread from person to person, but a small number of cases were a result of blood transfusions or organ transplants from infected people. There may also be a risk of infected mothers transmitting the virus to their unborn or nursing children.



WHAT ARE MY CHANCES OF GETTING WEST NILE VIRUS ?

In areas where West Nile virus has been detected, only a small proportion of mosquitoes are likely to be infected. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito do not become sick.

Less than 1% of people who are infected will become seriously ill.

10-15 percent of those seriously ill die.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS ?

The symptoms generally appear about 3-14 days after exposure. People over age 50 are at greater risk of severe illness.

Milder symptoms include

- slight fever
- headache
- body aches
- swollen glands
- sometimes a skin rash

Severe symptoms include

- high fever
- intense headache
- stiff neck
- confusion

Most people bitten by a mosquito infected with West Nile virus do not get sick.

WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I HAVE WEST NILE VIRUS ?

If you are bitten by a mosquito, you don't need to see a doctor. Most people who suffer a mild illness due to West Nile virus recover, and no treatment is necessary. Only supportive treatment is available for more serious cases. Testing for West Nile virus in people involves a blood or spinal fluid test that can take several weeks to confirm. No vaccine exists at this time for West Nile virus infection in humans.

PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH

The Virginia Department of Health, along with multiple other agencies, is monitoring for mosquito-borne viruses in birds, mosquitoes, horses and humans. The information collected is used to advise local authorities and the public about the potential threat of West Nile virus in Virginia.

REPORTING DEAD BIRDS

The public can help state officials monitor for the virus by reporting dead crows, bluejays and birds of prey to their local health department. Selected birds will be tested for the virus. Birds must be tested within 24 hours of death before they become too decomposed. Sunken eyes and the presence of fly larvae (maggots) are good indicators that the bird has been dead too long.

PREVENT WEST NILE VIRUS

Eliminate mosquito breeding areas around the home. Several of the species of mosquitoes most likely to carry West Nile virus can breed in containers in your own backyard.

Control Mosquitoes from Breeding

- Turn over or remove containers in your yard where rainwater collects, such as potted plant trays, buckets or toys.
- Empty birdbaths once a week.
- Remove old tires from your yard.
- Drain wading pools often.
- Clean roof gutters and downspout screens.
- Eliminate standing water on flat roofs.
- Do not allow water to collect in garbage cans.

Protect Yourself and Your Family

- Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.
- If possible, stay indoors when mosquitoes are biting.
- Use insect repellent with the smallest percentage of DEET that protects for the length of time you are exposed to mosquitoes, but no more than 50% for adults and 10% for children under 12.
- Only adults should apply repellent on children.
- Spray repellent on your hands and then apply to your face.
- Only apply repellent to exposed skin and clothing. Do not use repellent under clothing.
- Do not apply repellent over cuts, wounds, sunburn, or irritated skin.
- Wash off repellent daily and reapply as needed.

WEB SITES

Virginia Department of Health
www.vdh.state.va.us

Virginia Mosquito Control Association
www.mosquito-va.org/index.html

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
www.cdc.gov

EPA Pesticides & Mosquito Control
www.epa.gov/pesticides/

FOR MORE INFORMATION

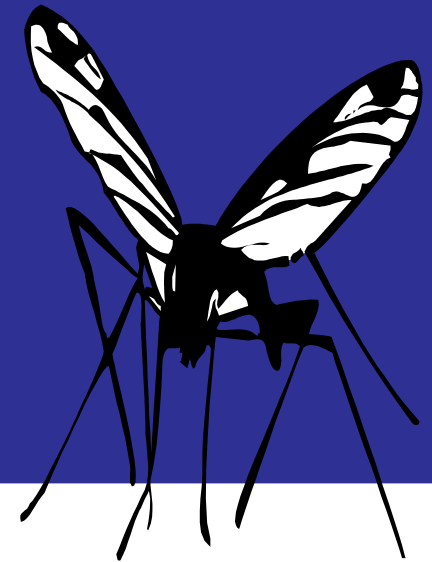
Contact your local Health Department or local Cooperative Extension Service office.

VDH VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH
Protecting You and Your Environment
www.vdh.state.va.us

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WEST NILE VIRUS

PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY



- **Risks & Symptoms**
- **Prevention & Surveillance**
- **Reporting Dead Birds**

West Nile Virus Infection

What is West Nile virus infection?

The West Nile virus infection is one that is spread by the bite of infected mosquitoes and usually causes a mild illness, but may also cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) or polio-like paralysis. This virus is named after the West Nile region of Uganda where the virus was first isolated in 1937. It was first identified in the United States in New York in 1999.

Who gets West Nile virus infection?

Anyone can get West Nile virus infection if bitten by an infected mosquito; however, even in areas where transmission of West Nile virus is known to be occurring only a small proportion of mosquitoes are likely to be infected. Less than 1% of people bitten by an infected mosquito will become seriously ill. People who are over age 50 are at greater risk of severe illness.

How is West Nile virus spread?

West Nile virus is almost always spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes are infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. West Nile virus is not spread from person to person or directly from birds to humans, but some cases have resulted from blood transfusion and organ transplants. There may be a chance that infected mothers may transmit the virus to their unborn or nursing children.

I've gotten a mosquito bite. Should I be tested for West Nile virus infection?

No, most mosquitoes are not infected with West Nile virus. See a physician if you develop the symptoms below.

What are the symptoms of West Nile virus infection?

The disease may be mild or serious. Mild illness includes fever and muscle aches, swollen lymph glands and sometimes a skin rash. In the elderly, infection may spread to the nervous system or bloodstream and cause sudden fever, intense headache, and stiff neck and confusion, possibly resulting in encephalitis or meningitis. Healthy children and adults may not have any symptoms.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The symptoms generally appear about 3 to 14 days after exposure but may appear as soon as 1 day after exposure or as late as 7 or more days.

Does past infection with West Nile virus make a person immune?

Yes, a person who gets West Nile virus probably cannot get it again.

What is the treatment for West Nile virus infection? Is there a vaccine for West Nile virus?

There is no specific treatment. Supportive therapy will be used in more severe cases. Most people recover from this illness. There is no vaccine for humans.

How can West Nile virus infection be prevented?

By controlling the mosquito population and protecting against mosquito bites in the following ways:

1. Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.
2. If possible, stay indoors when mosquitoes are biting.
3. Use insect repellent with the smallest percentage of DEET necessary for the length of time you are exposed to mosquitoes, but no more than 50% for adults and 10% for children under 12.
4. Turn over or remove containers in your yard where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, buckets and toys.
5. Eliminate standing water on tarps or flat roofs.
6. Clean out birdbaths and wading pools once a week.
7. Clean roof gutters and downspout screens.

Where can I get more information on West Nile virus?

Call your local health department or visit the following web sites-

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>

VDH Office of Epidemiology <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/epi/wnv.htm>

American Mosquito Control Association www.mosquito.org