

Vernon County Health Department

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Public Health
Protect. Promote. Prevent.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VERNON COUNTY HORSE TESTS POSITIVE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS

Protect Yourself Against Mosquito Bites

The Vernon County Health Department reports that a horse in Vernon County on 8/17/2017 has tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV). The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection reported the positive test result to the Wisconsin Division of Public Health. This is the first horse that tested positive for West Nile virus in Vernon County since surveillance for the mosquito-transmitted virus began May 1.

WNV is transmitted to humans, horses, birds, and other animals during bites from infected mosquitoes. Mosquitoes acquire WNV by feeding on infected birds. The virus is not transmitted person to person or directly between animals or between animals and humans. Presence of a WNV positive horse confirms that there are mosquitoes in the area infected with the WNV that can transmit the virus to people and other animals.

The majority of people (80%) who are infected with West Nile virus do not get sick. Those who do become ill usually experience mild symptoms such as fever, headache, muscle ache, rash, and fatigue. Less than 1% of people infected with the virus get seriously ill with symptoms that include high fever, muscle weakness, stiff neck, disorientation, mental confusion, tremors, confusion, paralysis, and coma. Older adults and those with compromised immune systems are at greater risk of developing central nervous system illness that can be fatal.

Because West Nile virus is known to be currently circulating, Wisconsin residents and visitors to the state should be vigilant in taking measures to prevent mosquito bites. It is important that people contact their healthcare provider if they suspect they have WNV illness.

Horse owners should be reminded to contact their veterinarian to vaccinate their animals. In addition to vaccination, horse owners can protect their horses by removing standing water and keeping animals inside from dusk to dawn.

The best way to avoid mosquito-borne diseases is to reduce exposure to mosquitoes and eliminate mosquito breeding sites. When cold weather arrives, the mosquitoes will be eliminated, but until then people are urged to take measures to protect themselves.

The Vernon County Health Department recommends the following:

- Limit time spent outside at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Apply an Environmental Protection Agency-registered insect repellent to clothing as well as exposed skin since mosquitoes may bite through clothing.
- Make sure window and door screens are in good repair to prevent mosquito entry.
- Properly dispose of items that hold water, such as tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots, or discarded tires.
- Clean roof gutters and downspouts for proper drainage.
- Turn over wheelbarrows, wading pools, boats, and canoes when not in use.
- Change the water in birdbaths and pet dishes at least every three days.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas, and hot tubs; drain water from pool covers.
- Trim tall grass, weeds, and vines since mosquitoes use these areas to rest during hot daylight hours.
- Landscape to prevent water from pooling in low-lying areas.

The Department of Health Services has monitored the spread of West Nile virus since 2001 among wild birds, horses, mosquitoes, and people. During 2002, the state documented its first human infections and 52 cases were reported that year. During 2016, 13 cases of West Nile virus were reported among Wisconsin residents. West Nile virus infections in humans have been reported from June through October; however, most reported becoming ill with West Nile virus in August and September.

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health will continue surveillance for West Nile virus until the end of the mosquito season. To report a sick or dead crow, blue jay, or raven, please call the Dead Bird Reporting Hotline at 1-800-433-1610.

For more information on West Nile virus:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/arboviral/westnilevirus.htm>