



August 15, 2003

WEST NILE CASES ON INCREASE

Only about 1 out of 150 people will exhibit symptoms from the West Nile disease but if you know someone that has had it, it can really be a severe illness and cause death in a few cases. Mild cases of the West Nile infection may include a slight fever and/or headache. Severe infections are marked by a rapid onset of a high fever, head and body aches, and usually occur 5 to 15 days after exposure. There is no specific treatment of viral infections, other than to treat the symptoms and provide supportive care. Those who are at highest risk of becoming seriously ill from the West Nile infection are persons who are over the age of 50. Healthy children and adults are at very low risk for infection. Birds are much more likely to be sick or die from the West Nile compared to humans. This year, 81 cases of West Nile have been confirmed or are probable in humans in Nebraska. So far, no one has been hospitalized this year in Saline County and let's hope it stays that way. The City of Crete did an excellent job spraying for mosquitoes at Tuxedo Park leading up to the Saline County Fair to knock down the mosquito population.

In Saline County, numerous people have asked about reporting dead birds and are concerned about dead birds that may be in their yard that potentially could have been killed by the West Nile Virus. If you have a dead bird that has not deteriorated or still has its pupils intact, you may put on a glove and collect the bird in a zip lock bag and freeze it. If this sounds too disgusting to you, double bag it! The birds are being collected by Public Health Solutions in Crete, our District Health Department, and are being sent to Lincoln to be tested. Thus far, Saline County has not had a positive test. Mainly large birds are being tested that are very sensitive to the West Nile like blue jays, magpies, crows, and owls, however, Dr. Wayne Kramer, Nebraska State Health Department, has informed me he will test smaller birds from Saline County, such as sparrows or swallows, because he has not had a positive test yet. These tests are important to the Health Department because it indicates how active the disease is in a particular county.

To report a dead bird, call Public Health Solutions District Health Department in Crete at (402) 826-3880 or (888) 310-0565. During business hours, they will also collect bird samples if they have been dead for less than 24 hours. Do not leave dead birds in front of the Saline County Extension door in Wilber or the Public Health Solutions door in Crete to decompose! For more information on what you can do to decrease the type of mosquito that carries the West Nile virus, go to the following website: www.hhs.state.ne.us/wnv/

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