



**For Immediate Release**

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**Plan to avoid West Nile virus this season!**

Mosquito season is upon us again. These pesky insects, out in force in some areas already, can be carriers of West Nile virus, a potentially serious illness. Mosquitoes become infected by biting (feeding on) an infected bird. An infected mosquito can then spread the virus to animals it bites, such as other birds and horses, as well as humans. The usual culprits are mosquitoes of the *Culex* species.

South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD), is making preparations for the upcoming summer months and mosquito season. “You can also help your community monitor West Nile virus by reporting dead birds to your local health department,” said Michele Bever, SHDHD executive director. “Dead birds may be a sign that West Nile virus is circulating between the birds and the mosquitoes in a particular area.”

Starting June 1, the SHDHD (serving Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties) will accept reports of freshly dead, adult birds. The Department may request that birds belonging to the Corvidae family, including Jays, Magpies, Crows and Ravens, be brought to the department for testing at the state lab.

To be tested, the bird must be collected and frozen for shipment within 24 hours of death. The Department is asking residents that find dead birds of the Corvidae family to contact the Department at 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595.

Health officials suggest early summer as a great time to assess your home environment to reduce mosquitos. “Empty standing water from anything that might serve as a container, such as flower pots, gutters, tires, buckets, etc.,” said Dr. Bever. “Drill a drainage hole in tire swings and frequently (at least weekly) empty and replace the water in pet bowls, children’s wading pools, or bird baths.”

“These practices should be continued all season long to help eliminate any areas where mosquitoes may breed,” she said.

Approximately 20% of people infected with West Nile virus experience milder symptoms consisting of fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach, and back. These symptoms can last from just a few days to several weeks.

Most people (4 out of 5) who are infected with West Nile virus do not show any symptoms at all, but there is no way to know ahead of time whether you will be one of these lucky ones. Most people with

mild symptoms recover on their own but for others the symptoms may last for weeks or months. More severe cases of West Nile illness may require hospitalization to receive supportive treatment.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests several ways to prevent mosquito bites. When you are outdoors, be sure to wear mosquito repellent containing DEET, or other insect repellent that is registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and follow the directions on the package for proper use. Between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active, wear long sleeves and pants or consider staying indoors. In addition, keep mosquitoes out of your house by installing screens or ensuring that the screens on your windows and doors are in good shape.

Dr. Bever encourages residents to “Remember these four “D”s of effective prevention: Dusk to Dawn (avoid outdoor activity or take extra care to protect yourself), Dress Appropriately (long sleeves, pants, socks when outside during the peak hours and locations of mosquito activity), DEET (in your mosquito repellent), Drain (any standing water).”

“Remind your family members and friends of these easy steps to “Fight the Bite,” Dr. Bever said.

For more information call South Heartland District Health Department at 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595 or visit the SHDHD website: [www.southheartlandhealth.org](http://www.southheartlandhealth.org)

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