

## **Don't give mosquitoes a biting chance**

Have you noticed an increase in mosquitoes in the last few weeks? I sure have! I like to work outside in the evening after work - when it is cooler - picking raspberries, weeding or watering plants – but right now the pesky mosquitoes make it uncomfortable. So, I've been putting on insect repellent and following the other recommended precautions. I hope you have, too!

There are several things we can do to reduce our exposure to mosquito bites and the first is to wear an EPA-registered repellent, such as one containing DEET, permethrin, picaridin, IR 3535, or oil of lemon eucalyptus.

It is also a good idea to wear long sleeved shirts and pants if you are out when mosquitoes are most active, which is from dusk to dawn.

Third, try to eliminate mosquito breeding sites on your property by eliminating areas with standing water, such as tires, buckets or toys. Turn over items that may collect water and change water in birdbaths or pet water bowls at least once per week to interrupt the breeding cycle. You might also check your gutters to make sure there is no debris and that water can drain.

Finally, make sure your doors and windows have tight fitting screens so that mosquitoes can't get in.

These steps may seem like a little bit of a bother to do, but taking steps to reduce mosquito bites can protect you and your family from illnesses carried by mosquitoes. Some mosquitoes are infected with viruses and, when they bite you to get a "blood meal", they can pass the virus to you.

The most common mosquito-carried disease in Nebraska is caused by the West Nile virus. In Nebraska, the main mosquito that carries this virus is the *Culex tarsalis*.

Mosquitoes become infected by biting (feeding on) an infected bird. The mosquito can then spread the virus to animals it bites, such as other birds, horses, and humans.

One of the health department activities during the months of June through early September is to trap mosquitoes for testing to determine if they are carrying the West Nile virus. This is part of a state-wide mosquito surveillance program, which involves trapping mosquitoes in certain counties, then sending the mosquitoes to the Nebraska state lab to be sorted by type of mosquito (species), counted, and analyzed to see if they are carrying the West Nile virus.

You can help us and your community monitor West Nile virus by reporting dead birds to the health department. Birds can die for many different reasons, but dead birds may be a sign that West Nile virus is circulating between the birds and the mosquitoes in a particular area.

If you live in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls or Webster counties and find a dead bird of the Corvidae family (jays, magpies, crows and ravens) please contact the health department at 402-462-6211

or toll free at 1-877-238-7595 to report the bird and find out whether it might be eligible to be tested for West Nile virus.

You might wonder: Is West Nile illness a big deal? It can be! Mild symptoms can include headache, body aches, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash. Typical symptoms of more severe West Nile infection can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, disorientation, and paralysis.

Fortunately, most people (4 out of 5) who are infected with West Nile virus do not show any symptoms; they don't even know they have been infected. However, the health department encourages anyone with symptoms to make an appointment with their doctor because severe symptoms can be permanent or even lead to death.

Last year, there were 288 cases of West Nile illness in Nebraska, including cases detected through blood donation. There were 11 deaths in Nebraska due to West Nile virus

There are no vaccines for many mosquito-borne illnesses including West Nile virus – making it all the more important to protect yourself from mosquito bites.

So, remember to practice the four “**D**”s of effective mosquito bite prevention: **D**usk to dawn (avoid outdoor activity or take extra care to protect yourself), **D**ress Appropriately (long sleeves, pants, socks when outside during the peak hours and locations of mosquito activity), **D**EET (in your mosquito repellent), **D**rain (any standing water).

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

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