

**What you can do**

West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health.

Most people with the virus have no clinical symptoms of illness, but some may become ill within days after the bite of an infected mosquito.

Three confirmed cases of mosquitoes testing positive for the virus have been reported this year in Illinois. The first human case in Illinois is not usually reported until July or later.

A variety of birds can carry the virus, and hundreds of dead birds were reported across the area last year. If you see a dead bird, call your county health department or the state:

Winnebago County: 815-720-4240.

Boone County: 815-544-2951.

Ogle County: 815-732-7330.

Illinois: Toll-free 866-369-9710 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

Unwelcome visitors back

Residents can reduce the risk of West Nile and other problems by eliminating standing water.

By Rob Baxter

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

[Click here for more information about Rob Baxter](#)

A familiar buzz is beginning to fill the air in backyards, parks and at baseball games across the area. Mosquitoes are back, and if current weather conditions persist, we could be in for a bumper crop, says Larry Swacina, environmental health director of the Winnebago County Health Department.

A dry, warm spring followed by a wet summer and fall can create ideal conditions for mosquitoes, especially the Culex mosquito, most likely to transfer the dangerous West Nile virus from birds to humans, Swacina said.

Already this year, three Illinois counties have confirmed cases of West Nile virus in mosquitoes, state reports show.

Across the area, different methods are used to control the pests to reduce the potential spread of disease.

There are larvicides that can be dropped into areas of standing water which kill the insects at various stages. Sprays, meanwhile, can be used by communities to treat larger areas. More natural controls are used at places like Severson Dells Forest Preserve.

"We have two bat houses and lots of natural habitat for bats," said Kathy Martinez, educator at Severson Dells. "Bats are pretty adaptable. They can hide in any little crevice, under the bark in trees, in old bird nests."

What's significant about each little brown bat, Martinez said, is not always apparent to everyone. The creatures can eat up to 800 mosquitoes an hour.

Then there's the Gravid Trap employed by Winnebago County. The trap attracts mosquitoes to its lair. The mosquitoes are then tested for the disease.

Swacina said the portable Gravid Traps can be taken to locations where many dead birds have been found or to other areas identified as possible hot spots for the virus.

Boone and Winnebago counties also can do trapping, treat standing water with larvicides and go door-to-door where necessary in the event bugs with the West Nile virus have been identified.

Doreen O'Brien, Ogle County Health Department administrator, reminds area residents the best prevention takes place starting in everyone's backyard. Typically, the Culex mosquito does not fly far from home, hence the need for no standing pails or cans of water, unchanged bird baths, or other containers that can create ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes.

"Property owners need to make sure they drain any standing water on their property," said Doug Beardsley, Boone County Health Department administrator. "Larvicides are widely available at home stores. The mosquitoes often look for ways to get in your house, so everyone should make sure their screens don't have holes and that they don't leave windows or doors open."

O'Brien said typically people won't heed the warnings no matter how many times they are given and that is where trouble starts.

"We are not a country of prevention but rather a country of reaction," she said.

Staff writer Rob Baxter can be reached at 815-987-1369 or rbaxter@rrstar.com.

Classified Partners: Jobs: CareerBuilder.com - Cars: Cars.com - Apartments: Apartments.com - Shopping: ShopLocal.com

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [Nation/World](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Espejo](#) | [Travel](#) | [Forums](#)

Copyright © 2007 Rockford Register Star.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons license.

