

## West Nile Virus

Summer is finally here and many Mason County residents are gardening, hiking, and heading outdoors for fun. It's also time to start thinking about West Nile virus prevention. The easiest and best way to avoid infection is to prevent mosquito bites.

Washington State Department of Health reports that last year was Washington's most active year for West Nile virus — 38 human illness cases were identified in the 2009 season, with exposures in either eastern Washington or out of state. The first death in Washington from the virus was reported in a Yakima County resident.

The first West Nile virus positive bird on the west side of the state in 2009 was from the Little Egypt Road area in Mason County. West Nile virus was detected in 72 horses, 22 dead birds, one dog, and 346 mosquito samples in the state in 2009. Half of all the horses infected died or were euthanized. There is a vaccine for horses; [contact a veterinarian for more details](#) (<http://agr.wa.gov/News/2010/10-07.aspx>).

Our warm, wet spring marked the start of mosquito-breeding season, so it's vital to get rid of the things around your home that provide mosquito habitat. We want to reduce mosquito breeding habitat before the bugs get started. Empty water from old tires; turn over old buckets or cans; and frequently change water in pet dishes, birdbaths, and water troughs to help eliminate the small puddles of water in which many mosquito larvae grow.

Simple personal protection steps will make it harder for mosquitoes to bite you. Wear long-sleeve shirts, pants, and hats in mosquito-infested areas; use an effective repellent on exposed skin at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active. Always follow label directions when using repellents. Make sure screens on your home are working; fix or replace broken screens.

The virus is spread by infected mosquitoes. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito won't have any symptoms. Some may develop mild symptoms, such as fever or headache that go away without treatment. The virus is most dangerous for people with weak immune systems and those over 50. In some cases, people may develop meningitis or encephalitis; some neurological effects can be permanent.

Monitoring for the virus — including dead bird testing — resumed this spring. The information collected helps state and local health agencies identify unusual increases or clusters of bird deaths. People can [report dead birds](#) ([www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html)) using the State Department of Health's dead bird reporting system, or by calling Mason County Public Health at (360) 427-9670 EXT 400 or from Belfair (360) 275-4467 EXT 400. To learn more about West Nile Virus visit [www.doh.wa.gov/wnv](http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv) or call 1-866-78VIRUS.