

West Nile Virus mosquitoes documented in Scott County

Written by Marty Randall

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Officials of the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) recently announced that mosquito pools in Scott County have tested positive for the West Nile Virus. It's the first sign of the disease in the county this year.

ISDH officials stated that citizens should take the appropriate precautions to avoid mosquito bites.

There is no human vaccine available to combat the virus nor is there any known cure for West Nile Virus, but the illness can be prevented by following these steps:

- Avoid being outdoors during prime mosquito biting times, dusk to dawn, when possible.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET and follow label directions when applying.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants.

West Nile Virus is transmitted to humans by mosquitoes that have first bitten an infected bird. A person infected through a mosquito bite may show symptoms three to 15 days after being bitten.

It's safe to say that Hoosiers in all counties should take recommended precautions. According to an ISDH map, Scott joins 22 other counties where West Nile-positive samples have been found. Another nine Indiana counties are considered severely infested with virus-bearing mosquitoes. Washington County is the nearest county to Scott where such insects have been discovered.

Only one bite can make a human being very sick with West Nile fever. Symptoms can include fever, headaches, body aches, swollen lymph glands and/or a rash.

A small number of individuals may develop a more severe form of the disease that includes encephalitis, meningitis and other neurological syndromes as well as flaccid muscle paralysis. Though some people may believe that cooler temperatures will bring an end to the mosquito season, that's simply not so. Mosquitoes which have tested positive for West Nile are going to be infective as long as they live; cooler temperatures will not kill them. A good freeze will stop the cycle, but many adult female mosquitoes will retire to a basement, crawl space or other suitable area and remain dormant there until spring.

It's important, therefore, to remember that this time of year can be very dangerous because the number of infected mosquitoes are at its peak.

Everyone should participate in making the environment as safe as possible. Health officials are asking residents to take steps to rid their properties of potential mosquito breeding grounds by:

- Repairing failed septic systems.
- Drilling holes in the bottom of recycling containers that are left outside so they won't hold pools of water. Just a little water is needed for mosquitoes to lay their eggs and for larvae to hatch into hungry adults.
- Keeping grass cut short and shrubbery trimmed back.
- Disposing of old tires, tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or other unused containers that can hold water.
- Cleaning clogged roof gutters, particularly if leaves tend to plug up drains.
- Aerating ornamental pools or stocking them with predatory fish that will feed on mosquito larvae.

Individuals over age 50 are at the greatest risk for serious illness and even death from West Nile Virus, but people of all ages have been infected with the virus and have experienced severe symptoms.

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Visit <https://isdhmaps.in.gov/apps/pubstat/WNVStat.htm> for updated state maps and current information about West Nile Virus activity in Indiana.