With local mosquito "pools" testing positive for West Nile virus in Scott County, residents are being urged to take steps to protect themselves and their families from contracting the illness.

This is prime mosquito time in Southern Indiana, so the number of mosquitoes infected with West Nile virus is at its peak. It takes only one "bite" to make a human very sick.

Officials with the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) say there are precautions that citizens can take to avoid mosquito bites. West Nile virus is transmitted by mosquitoes that have first "bitten" an infected bird. A person bitten by the infected mosquito may show flu-like symptoms within three to 15 days.

Residents are urged to take the following protective steps:

•Avoid being outdoors during prime mosquito-biting times, dusk to dawn.

•If you plan to enjoy outdoor activities, generously apply insect repellent containing DEET by following the label directions. Spray clothing, too, if directions allow.

•Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.

There is no human vaccine and no cure for West Nile virus. Those infected usually suffer a mild illness, known as West Nile fever, and symptoms include fever, headache, body aches, swollen glands and/or a rash. A small number of individuals can develop a more severe form of the disease with encephalitis or meningitis and other neurological syndromes, including flaccid muscle paralysis.

Health officials are also asking people to take steps to rid their properties of potential mosquito breeding grounds by:

•Repairing failed septic systems.

•Treat basements, garages and other areas where mosquitoes are most likely to gather.

•Drilling holes in the bottom of recycling containers left outdoors.

•Keeping grass cut short and shrubbery trimmed.

•Disposing of old tires, tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or other unused containers that can hold water and thus serve as a breeding pool for mosquito larva.

•Cleaning clogged roof gutters, particularly if leaves tend to plug up the drains.

•Aerating ornamental pools or stocking them with predatory fish that will eat hatching larva.

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 suffered severe

cases of the disease.

Consequently, it's safe to assume that all Hoosiers throughout the state should take recommended precautions. Additionally, mosquito season does not end with the onset of cooler fall weather. Mosquitoes that have tested positive as West Nile carriers are infective as long as they are alive.

Cooler temperatures don't kill mosquitoes. Many adult females will find refuge in basements, crawl spaces or other suitable areas and remain dormant until spring. A good freeze will stop this season's cycle, but most times Southern Indiana doesn't experience such a freeze until November.

For more information on West Nile virus, visit the ISDH website at www.isdh.in.gov. to view a map of Indiana counties reporting West Nile virus cases or mosquito testing, visit http://gis.in.gov/apps/ISDH/Arbo/.