

For Immediate Release | August 22, 2018

Birds in BC tested positive for West Nile virus

The provincial Animal Health Centre lab has confirmed two dead ravens submitted from Kimberley as part of routine surveillance have tested positive for West Nile virus. This is the first evidence of West Nile virus activity in the province this year. To date, there have no human cases reported, no positive mosquito pools identified, and no positives identified by Canadian Blood Services through their screening program.

Interior Health works closely with the B.C. Centre for Disease Control and Canadian Blood Services to monitor West Nile virus activity. Surveillance includes screening the blood supply and reporting human and animal cases.

The risk of infection from handling birds is very low; however, you should not use your bare hands to handle wild birds (dead or alive). If you need to move a dead bird [precautions should be taken](#). Unusual clusters of dead birds can be reported to the BC Interagency Wild Bird Mortality Investigation at **1-866-431-BIRD (2473)**.

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus is a disease usually spread between birds by mosquitoes. Some mosquitoes in Canada can spread West Nile virus to humans through mosquito bites.

Mosquitoes can also transmit West Nile virus to horses and occasionally to other animals. Horse owners are advised to contact their veterinarians for information about equine vaccines for West Nile virus.

The risk of getting West Nile virus is highest in the warmer months of the summer, usually from the end of July through August. The risk of becoming seriously ill is low for most people; however, people over the age of 50 and those with compromised immune systems are more at risk.

How can I protect myself?

There are things everyone can do to reduce the risk of West Nile virus infection. Any activity that prevents mosquitoes from biting or breeding can help to reduce the risk.

- **Prevent mosquito breeding around your home.** Anything that can hold water can be a mosquito breeding area. Identify and remove potential breeding areas on your property - empty saucers under flowerpots; change water in bird baths twice a week; unclog rain gutters; drain tarps, tires, and other debris where rain water may collect; and install a pump in ornamental ponds or stock them with fish. Stagnant backyard pools can be a big source of mosquitoes and should be maintained regularly to prevent mosquito growth.
- **Install screens on windows.** Screens will help prevent mosquitoes from coming indoors.
- **Avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn.** This is the time of day mosquitoes that can carry the virus are most active.
- **Wear protective clothing.** If you are in an area with many mosquitoes, wear loose fitting, light coloured clothing, full-length pants, and a long-sleeved shirt.

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- **Use mosquito repellent.** Apply mosquito repellent to areas of exposed skin. Check the product label for instructions on proper use. Repellents containing DEET are safe for those over six months of age when used according to the directions on the label. View the HealthLinkBC file on DEET (<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile96.stm>) for guidelines on how frequently to apply repellent. DEET-free products (such as those containing icardin, p-menthane-3, 8-diol /lemon-eucalyptus oil, or soybean oil) are also available, but may not provide as long-lasting protection.

For more information:

- Interior Health – [Mosquitoes and West Nile virus](#)
- HealthLink BC – [Insect Repellent and DEET](#)
- BC Centre for Disease Control – [West Nile virus](#)
- Ministry of Agriculture – [Historic Information on West Nile Virus in British Columbia](#)