WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV): FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is West Nile Virus (WNV)?
West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne virus causing illness throughout the world, including all 50 U.S. states. Mosquitoes acquire WNV through blood meals from birds harboring the virus; they pass it on to the next bird or animal they bite. Although humans, horses, and other mammals can be infected by the virus, they are considered “dead end hosts” that do not transmit the virus to other animals. Mosquitoes are needed to transmit the virus.

What species are affected by WNV?
Although any bird or mammal can be infected by the virus, signs of illness occur primarily in humans, horses, and some bird species (corvids, i.e., crows, ravens, magpies, jays, etc.).

What are the signs of WNV infection?
WNV causes inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) and/or its covering membranes (meningitis). Signs range from no signs to death. Affected horses may have a fever, lethargy, depression, poor appetite, head pressing, blindness, seizures, weakness, incoordination, recumbency, coma, and death. Sick birds tend to hide, so dead corvids are the ones typically found. For signs of human illness, visit https://www.cdc.gov/westnile.

How can I protect myself and birds from WNV?
The best way to decrease the threat of WNV is to control and prevent exposure to mosquitoes:
1. Remove old tires, buckets, plastic covers, toys, and other containers that can hold water and serve as a mosquito reservoir.
2. Change water in bird baths, fountains, wading pools, watering troughs, etc., every 4 days.
3. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when in mosquito-infested areas. Also consider wearing mosquito repellent. Stay indoors during peak mosquito activity (dusk to dawn).
4. Encourage population of mosquito-eating wildlife such as bats, hummingbirds, swallows, purple martins, and waterfowl.
5. Add mosquito larvae-eating fish species to water troughs (goldfish, catfish, bullheads, guppies) and ponds (bass, bluegills, catfish, bullheads).
6. Keep birds and animals in screened housing.
7. Use fans to move air (mosquitoes do not like moving air).
8. WNV vaccines are available for horses but are not yet available for birds or humans.
What do I do if I suspect my bird has died from WNV?
If you suspect your bird has died from WNV, contact your private veterinarian, the Washington State Department of Agriculture Avian Health Program at 800-606-3056, or your local health department.

What should I do if I find dead wild birds?
Report dead wild birds of concern to the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife by using their online reporting system at https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/a384e90f69744f2e846135a9ce80027f.

Where can I find more information?
For more information on WNV, visit the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website.
For information on local WNV outbreaks in humans and animals, visit the Washington State Department of Health website.

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