SAFETY INSIGHT

Take Steps To Stop West Nile Virus

(NAPS)—It's not just the summer, but being outdoors in the fall that can mean mosquitoes and the threat of West Nile virus.

West Nile virus has spread throughout the United States, causing serious illness. Most infections happen during August and September. Mosquitoes get the virus from biting infected birds and in turn infect humans by biting them.

Most people bitten by an infected mosquito will not get sick, however, about 20 percent of people bitten by an infected mosquito will develop West Nile virus —fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and sometimes swollen lymph nodes or a body rash. About 1 in 150 people who are infected become seriously ill, with severe headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness and paralysis.

Last year in the United States, nearly 10,000 people became very sick from West Nile virus and 264 died. This year, authorities are prepared for the possibility of an even larger outbreak. Thankfully, there are some protective steps you can take.

Dead birds might be a sign of West Nile virus in your area. If you find a dead bird in your yard, notify the health department and follow instructions.

Even if you don't find a dead bird, there can still be mosquitoes with West Nile virus in your area. Even if you don't see many mosquitoes, it still makes sense to protect against being bitten. People over 50 are at greatest risk of developing serious illness, so they should be especially alert about preventing mosquito bites.

Even late in the season, there are steps you can take to protect yourself against West Nile virus.

Prevent Mosquito Bites

• When outdoors, use insect repellents containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide).

Follow the directions on the package.

• Many mosquitoes are most active between dusk and dawn. Take extra care to use a repellent and wear long sleeves and pants during this time, or consider avoiding outdoor activities.

• Make sure you have good screens on your windows and doors.

• Eliminate potential mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from places like flowerpots, buckets and cans. Change the water in pet dishes daily and replace the water in birdbaths at least weekly. Children's wading pools should be emptied and stored on their sides when not in use.

For more information on West Nile virus, visit www.cdc.gov/west nile.