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Oregon bird tests positive for West Nile virus

A dead crow found in Vale has tested positive for West Nile virus, public health officials in Malheur County and the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) confirmed today. The testing was conducted at Oregon State University's Veterinarian Diagnostic Laboratory.

This is the state's first sign of the virus, which was introduced to the United States in 1999.

"We've been expecting West Nile virus to appear in Oregon at any time, so this is not a surprise," said Mel Kohn, M.D., state epidemiologist in DHS. "This does not necessarily mean that we expect to see human cases any time soon. But, it does mean that people need to be sure they are taking precautions against mosquitoes."

The best defense against West Nile virus is for individuals to protect themselves from mosquito bites, Kohn says. He advises people to take five simple steps:

- Eliminate all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding, for example leaf-clogged gutters, birdbaths and old tires;
- Avoid mosquito-infested areas at dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active;

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- Wear long pants, long sleeve shirts and other protective clothing when you are outdoors;
- Wear insect repellent, preferably one that contains DEET. Follow label directions when using any repellent;
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.

West Nile virus is an infection that lives in birds. It is spread when a mosquito feeds on an infected bird and then bites a human. Birds cannot transmit the disease to humans, nor can it be transmitted through person-to-person contact, according to Kohn.

Oregon officials have been monitoring mosquitoes and birds for the appearance of West Nile virus since 2001. Vector control districts throughout the state routinely collect mosquito specimens and maintain flocks of sentinel chickens, both of which are tested regularly by the Oregon State Public Health Laboratory in Portland.

“This announcement of an infected bird will undoubtedly cause people to be concerned if they find a dead bird,” Kohn says. “We are testing only dead crows, jays, ravens, and magpies, and they must be dead for less than 24 hours.”

If people find a dead bird and are concerned about what to do with it, they should report it to their local health department or vector control agency, according to Kohn.

Additional information about West Nile virus can be found on the Web at <http://www.dhs.state.or.us/publichealth/acd/wnile/index.cfm>.

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