

**Crow confirmed with West Nile virus**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACTS:**

Dr. Bill Johnston  
(334) 206-5969

Ashley Rossi Lovell  
(334) 844-9244

Dr. Jim Armstrong  
(334) 844-9233

The Alabama Department of Public Health announces that West Nile virus (WNV) has been confirmed in the first bird in the state for 2002 - a crow from Coffee County. Ongoing public health surveillance for the virus has not detected any cases of WNV in humans or in horses in Alabama.

According to Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, "Most people who are infected with WNV do not even get sick. However, a small proportion of people - mostly people over 60 - may become ill with symptoms of encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and require hospitalization." Mosquitoes spread the virus by feeding on the blood of infected birds. The disease cannot be spread from person to person, Dr. Williamson said.

Ashley Lovell, USDA wildlife biologist who is coordinating the state's WNV surveillance project, reported, "The crow was found ill on May 29, in downtown Enterprise by the animal control officer, euthanized and sent to the Alabama Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Auburn for testing."

The discovery of WNV in Alabama is three months earlier than the first case detected last year, according to state public health veterinarian, Dr. Bill Johnston. "Considering that southeast Alabama has suffered a drought this year, finding WNV activity this early should serve as a red flag that mosquito prevention and avoidance should be stepped up for the remainder of the mosquito season."

Southeast Alabama is usually the first area of the state that mosquito-borne viruses such as WNV and Eastern Equine Encephalitis are found, but WNV should be considered established throughout the state, Johnston explained.

"Unlike other encephalitis viruses that maintain their cycle with wild birds, WNV kills many of the infected birds - especially crows, blue jays, and raptors," said Dr. Jim Armstrong, extension wildlife specialist with the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service. Public health officials are testing dead birds of those three types as one way to watch for the virus. People who find dead crows, blue jays, or birds of prey should get them to their county health department or county extension agent who will submit them for testing, suggested Armstrong.

Dead crows, blue jays and raptors are our first sign of virus activity in an area. The public should submit newly dead birds for testing. Anything that has been dead for more than 24 hours in the summer heat is probably not testable.

Scientists will further study the areas where positive birds are found to determine mosquito species possibly carrying the virus and to monitor numbers of mosquitoes. It is important for citizens to note the exact location of dead birds when they are found, Johnston concluded.

In addition to the usual mosquito avoidance messages, health officials and Dr. Gary Mullen, medical entomologist at Auburn University, offer practical strategies for the mosquito season:

#### PERSONAL PROTECTION; CLOTHING AND AROMATICS

- Wear loose fitting, light colored clothes to help prevent mosquitoes from reaching the skin and to retain less heat, making yourself less "attractive" to mosquitoes. Mosquitoes are more attracted to dark colors.
- When possible, wear long sleeves and long pants.
- Avoid perfumes, colognes, fragrant hair sprays, lotions and soaps, which attract mosquitoes.

#### PERSONAL PROTECTION; REPELLENTS

- Follow the label instructions when applying repellents. Permethrin repellents are only for clothes - not on the skin.
- When using repellents avoid contact with eyes, lips and nasal membranes.
- Use concentrations of less than 10 percent when applying DEET containing products on children.
- Apply DEET repellent on arms, legs, and other exposed areas, but never under clothing.
- After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water.
- Citronella candles and repellents containing citronella can help, but their range is limited. Herbs such as cedar, geranium, pennyroyal, lavender, cinnamon, and garlic are not very effective.

#### PERSONAL PROTECTION; AROUND THE HOME

- Mosquito activity peaks at dusk and again at dawn; restrict outdoor activity during these hours.
- Keep windows and door screens in good condition.
- Replace porch lights with yellow light bulbs that will attract fewer insects.
- Mosquitoes breed in standing water; empty all water from old tires, cans, jars, buckets, drums, plastic wading pools, toys, and other containers. Clean clogged gutters.
- Remove the rim from potted plants and replace water in plant/flower vases weekly.
- Replenish pet watering dishes daily and rinse bird baths twice weekly.

- Fill tree holes and depressions left by fallen trees with dirt or sand.
- Stock ornamental ponds with mosquito fish or use larvicide "doughnuts."

### **Public Education Campaign**

A website has been developed with important information about the West Nile virus and precautions that individuals should take to protect themselves and their families from the risk of mosquito-borne viruses. The site can be linked from [www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org).

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