



**WILL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
&  
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER**

## **For Immediate Release**

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News media calls to Vic Reato: Media Services Manager at (815)727-5088.

### **HEALTH DEPARTMENT TO ACTIVATE WEST NILE VIRUS INFORMATION LINE**

JOLIET - May marks the beginning of the West Nile Virus season across Illinois.

County residents can help to minimize the potential for WNV transmission to humans by reporting dead birds to the Will County Health Department. Will County's WNV Information Line will be available May 1, for individuals wishing to report dead birds that can help identify the potential for human infections. The 24-hour service is accessible at 815-740-7631.

Launched in May 2002, the Information Line enables area residents to access the latest information concerning WNV, report the location of dead birds, and talk to a Health Department representative about the disease during regular weekly business hours. Will County Environmental Health uses dead bird reports to monitor potential WNV hot spots and identify other possible trends requiring Health Department intervention.

Adult crows and blue jays have long been testing priorities, but the Illinois Department of Public Health will accept 14 bird species for laboratory analysis. Other birds suitable for testing include: robins, finches, grackles, sparrows, wrens, swallows and cardinals. "WNV poses potential health risks for everyone," according to Will County Environmental Health Director Elizabeth Bilotta. "We are interested in the location of dead birds because that information is one way we are able to assess the potential for local virus activity. Dead bird monitoring and testing is a critical part of the statewide WNV surveillance initiative."

The Health Department will collect a limited number of reported dead birds and submit them to the state for analysis. You can view pictures of bird testing priorities by visiting the Environmental Health page at [www.willcountyhealth.org](http://www.willcountyhealth.org).

WNV is a mosquito-borne disease capable of producing encephalitis and meningitis, potentially fatal inflammations of the brain and spinal chord. Residents can minimize personal risk by avoiding outdoor activity at dusk and near dawn, when mosquitoes are most active. Wearing light-colored long sleeves and eliminating potential mosquito breeding sites on your property can also reduce personal risk. Residents are also advised to use insect repellent containing DEET, or other chemical compounds that deter mosquitoes when spending time outdoors.

Through February 13, 2009, human WNV activity had been reported in 43 states for the 2008 season. There were 1,338 total cases and 43 national fatalities reported a year ago.

The State of Illinois has reported at least 1,586 human WNV infections and 99 fatalities since 2002. The State totals include 52 Will County cases and two local fatalities.

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