



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES



29 HAZEN DRIVE, CONCORD, NH 03301-6527  
603-271-5927 1-800-852-3345 Ext. 5927  
Fax: 603-271-0545 TDD Access: 1-800-735-2964

## **Arboviruses and Birds: West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis**

### **How are birds involved in the transmission of West Nile Virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)?**

Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Birds become infected through the bite of an infected mosquito. EEE and WNV have a cycle of natural infection among bird populations with occasional “incidental” infections in humans, non-human mammals (most often horses) and large domesticated birds (emus, ostriches, etc) due to indiscriminate feeding mosquito species (i.e. species that bite both birds and larger mammals). Infected mammals (e.g., humans, horses) do not serve to spread the virus since mosquitoes biting infected mammals do not become infected.

### **What is the significance of dead birds?**

Following changes in bird mortality may help identify areas of viral activity. Wild birds, primarily crows and blue jays (corvids) may die following infection with WNV. Corvids, as well as passerines (i.e., perching birds or “songbirds”), are also susceptible to infection with EEE. However, since birds can die for many different reasons, finding a dead bird does not necessarily mean that the virus is present.

Recent national and local analysis suggests WNV dead bird testing is becoming less useful for early detection and evaluation of WNV risk. Most birds infected with EEE do not succumb to severe disease and no longer provide useful data for disease surveillance and response. For these reasons, wild bird testing will not occur on a regular basis.

### **If I see a dead bird, what should I do?**

In some circumstances, dead birds may be tested for diseases that might affect human health. If the situation warrants (e.g., multiple dead birds without a known cause), call your local animal control officer, health officer, their designated representative or in their absence, call the WNV Information Line, 1-866-273-6453. You will be asked questions about the condition of the birds in order to determine if they are potentially viable specimens for testing.

### **What do I do if the bird(s) are approved for testing?**

In the event DHHS staff has determined the bird(s) are suitable specimens for testing, it is the responsibility of the local community to arrange for the transportation of dead birds to the Public Health Laboratory, such as through animal control officers. **Please do not deliver birds without prior authorization.**

- Use waterproof gloves when handling a dead bird. If you don't have gloves, insert your hand into a plastic bag, grasp the bird carefully and insert the bag over the bird.
- Each bird should be double-bagged.
- Refrigerate the bird immediately in an insulated container with freezer packs or in a refrigerator not used for food, or place ice packs on top of the bird and invert a pail over it, weighted down to avoid being dislodged, until the bird can be picked up.
- Attach the intake form (see the Bird Intake Form) or a piece of paper to each bag with the following information:
  - Species (if known)
  - Date collected
  - Location where bird was found (town/street/address, etc.)
  - Include any additional relevant information

### **Can I get WNV or EEE from an infected bird?**

Human cases have not been traced to direct contact with wild birds. Although WNV or EEE have not been shown to spread directly from birds to people, we urge citizens not to touch dead birds, or any other dead animal, with bare hands. The possibility exists for virus from an infected bird to pass through a cut or opening in the skin.

### **How do I dispose of a dead bird?**

If not collected for testing, please carefully dispose of the dead bird. Bury the dead bird using gloves or a shovel to avoid direct contact. The bird may also be double bagged in plastic disposable bags and thrown in the trash.

### **My dog/cat had a dead bird in its mouth. Will it get WNV or EEE?**

WNV and EEE are transmitted to humans and other mammals through the bite of an infected mosquito. There have been no documented cases of a dog or cat becoming infected after eating a dead infected bird. Even if bitten by an infected mosquito, WNV and EEE infections do not cause serious illness in most dogs or cats.

### **I found a dead bird in my pool. Is it safe to swim in?**

There is no evidence to suggest that you can contract WNV or EEE from swimming in a pool. As a general precaution, it is good practice to keep up with the chemical maintenance requirements of your pool, particularly when a dead animal has been in the water.

**For more information, call the NH DHHS WNV/EEE Information Line at  
1-866-273-NILE (6453)**