



ISLAND COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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HEALTH INFORMATION BULLETIN (HIB)

HIB #101

DEAD BIRD SURVEILLANCE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS

Topics covered in this HIB:

- Why is the Health Department collecting dead birds?
- What types of birds are collected for surveillance?
- What to do if you find a dead bird?

Introduction:

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne disease that can cause illness in birds, horses and humans. WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Dead birds may be a sign that West Nile virus is circulating between birds and the mosquitoes in an area.

Why is the Health Department Collecting Dead Birds?

A sensitive indicator of WNV activity in a general geographic area is the presence of dead birds that are positive for WNV. Some bird species, such as chickens, do not become ill when infected with WNV nor do they accumulate enough of the virus in their systems to readily pass the virus back to mosquitoes. However, Raptors (e.g. hawks and owls) and Corvids (e.g. crows, ravens, magpies and jays) are especially susceptible to WNV and often sicken and die from the virus. This sensitivity and the fact that wild birds are in contact with mosquitoes far longer than most humans make their deaths a good leading indicator for potential human cases.

There were 208 dead birds reported to ICHD during the 2003 survey, nearly all crows. Forty-four (44) crows, two (2) owls, and one (1) red-tailed hawk met testing criteria and were sent in to Washington State Department of Health (DOH) for viral testing. All were shown to be free of WNV. In 2004, the DOH tested 23 crows from Island County of which all tested negative for WNV.

What Types of Birds are Collected for Surveillance?

Island County Health Department will be participating in the Washington State Department of Health's dead bird surveillance program this summer. We will be reporting dead bird sightings and collecting freshly dead crows, jays, ravens and

magpies (less than 48 hours old) to be tested by the Washington State DOH lab for WNV. The birds collected must be intact (not scavenged) and have no apparent sign of death.

What to do if you find a dead bird?

Avoid barehanded contact with any dead animals! Use gloves or an inverted plastic bag to place the bird carcass in a garbage bag. Call the Health Department (679-7350). At that time we will help identify what type of bird it is and determine if it can be submitted for testing. We will be entering **all** calls of dead birds into a database for state surveillance. If the bird is something other than a Raptor or Corvid or is greater than 48 hours dead, then you will be instructed to dispose of the carcass in the garbage. If an Environmental Health Specialist decides the bird you are reporting meets the criteria for testing he/she will request that you bring the bird into the health department where we can ship it to the Department of Health State Lab.

If you find a dead bird on the weekend or after work hours (8am-4:30pm), please call 679-5573 to report any dead birds. This is an after-hours phone line specifically for WNV dead bird surveillance. An Environmental Health Specialist will return your call.

Other Informational Resources

- <http://www.islandcounty.net/health/Envh/MosquitoSurveillance.htm>
- http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/qa/wnv_birds.htm
- <http://www.wnv.wsu.edu/>

NOTE: The information presented within this Health Information Bulletin (HIB) is provided to assist with the clarification of a detailed and complex process generally involving rules and regulations. The information contained in this HIB may not provide a complete description of all the required elements of a permit process; therefore, it is always recommended that an applicant review the pertinent regulation or discuss their plans with a Health Department representative.
