Results of West Nile virus study concern MD

West Nile.

Two-thirds surveyed had

containers with water -

known mosquito breeding

sites - on their properties; a

quarter had door and window

screen tears; nearly two-thirds

rarely or never wore insect

repellent outdoors for 30 min-

utes or longer; half rarely or

By JASON MISNER SPECIAL TO THE BE.WER

The risk of getting seriously ill after contracting West Nile virus is higher than was first thought and has propelled McMaster University researchers to find out why.

An abbreviated version of long-awaited results from a spring blood study, documenting the prevalence of the mosquito-borne West Nile virus in Oakville residents, was released Friday. It showed that one out of 84 cases of West Nile can result in serious illness like encephalitis or meningitis, sometimes requiring hospitalization.

"The prevalence rate is well within the range of normal and that's what we expected," said Dr. Susan Elliott, the dean of social sciences at McMaster who was one of three researchers contracted by the Province to do the \$250,000 study. "But the possibility of getting seriously ill is higher than previously thought. That deserves further investigation."

Previous studies in the United States indicated that one person out of every 150 West Nile cases became seriously ill. It's the first detailed study of its kind in Canada and gives health officials and medical researchers some

insight into the virus and its impact.

study looking at serious West Nile cases in Ontario and Saskatchewan, which was Canada's provincial West Nile hot spot this year, Elliott said. "We are doing our own follow up," she said, noting it would include an evaluation of physical and mental health.

Elliott hopes to have the results compiled and ready for public release early next summer, when the West Nile season typically starts.

The point of the blood study was to find how many residents in two postal code areas in Oakville contracted West Nile. They were chosen because they had the highest rate of infection in North America last year.

Of the 1,505 residents who provided a blood sample, 46 tested positive, or 3.1 per cent, for virus antibodies. It produced a ratio suggesting that between 670 and 1,219 of the 30,467 residents living in the sample areas were infected.

In that area, there were six cases of encephalitis (all hospitalized) and five cases of meningitis (one hospitalized). Eight people also had West Nile fever (one hospitalized).

Generally, the Oakville number of 3.1 per cent was comparable to the number infected in New York at 2.6

never wore long-sleeved The Oakville study found shirts and pants. More than McMaster will conduct a most, or 65 per cent, of those half did nothing to prevent testing positive for the anti-

themselves from being bitten. bodies were over 50 years of Elliott said she was astonage. The study also looked at ished to see the lack of protecbehavioural patterns mainly to tion from the public against West Nile. "This is just starsee what people did to protect tling to me," she said. themselves against getting

Dr. Bob Nosal, Halton's Medical Officer of Health, said the report takes into account data from last year not this year, but concludes that residents need to take precautions against West Nile. The entire blood study is to be released to the Province later this week.

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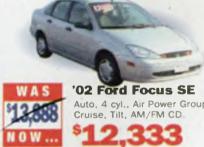
























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