

West Nile virus risk still high

The Halton Region Health Department in reminding residents to cover up, use insect repellent with DEET and avoid being outdoors from early evening to morning when mosquitoes are most active and likely to bite.

Several batches of mosquitoes collected over the last five consecutive weeks in Milton, Oakville and Burlington have tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV).

Laboratory tests over the last three weeks have also confirmed there are nine humans infected with WNV in Halton— two in Milton and seven in Burlington. Two of the Burlington cases were of people who didn't have symptoms, but were identified during routine testing as part of the blood donation process.

"The risk of infection will be present until temperatures cool significantly, so it is important to protect yourself from mosquito bites and remove areas of standing water where mosquitoes breed," said Dr. Monir Taha, Halton's associate medical officer of health.

Mosquitoes can transmit WNV to humans after becoming infected by feeding on the blood of birds carrying the virus. About 80 per cent of people who become infected with WNV don't experience any illness, while about 20 per cent will develop West Nile fever. Less than 1 per cent will develop inflammation of the brain or its lining, or a type of paralysis.

Older adults and people with underlying illnesses should be particularly cautious, as they are more likely to develop illness.

The following are steps that residents can take to protect themselves and their families from mosquitoes:

- Cover up. Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved shirts and pants with tightly-woven fabric.
- Avoid being outdoors from early evening to morning when mosquitoes are most active and likely to bite, as well as at any time in shady, wooded areas.
- Reduce mosquito breeding sites around your home by getting rid of all water-filled containers and objects. Change the water in bird baths at least once per week.
- Use an approved insect repellent, such as one containing DEET.

• Make sure your window and door screens are tight and without holes, cuts or other openings where mosquitoes could enter your home.

Up-to-date information on WNV, including both human infections and positive mosquito pools, is available on the health department's website at www.halton.ca/wnv.

To report standing water or for more information about WNV, dial 311 or call Halton Region at (905) 825-6000, toll free at 1-866-442-5866 or e-mail wnv@halton.ca.



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