

# Protecting children in the age of West Nile virus

BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT

West Nile virus (WNV) is new to North America, and definitive answers to all of the questions about it are just not possible yet. Scientific data will need to be collected for a few years first. Yet parents worried about their children this summer want to know how best to protect them.

It may be comforting to know that the risk of WNV to children appears to be low. Last year's data indicates that older people and those with weaker immune systems are more susceptible. "The mean age in Halton for people having West Nile virus was 54," says Maurice Dickhout, Manager, Environmental Health with the Halton Region Health Department.

Even if children become infected with the virus, it's likely that it won't be noticeable. The Health Department has published figures stating that 80 per cent of people infected have no symptoms at all. Less than 20 per cent have West Nile fever, suffering from fever, headache, muscle ache and rash. It is only less than one per cent of those infected with the fever who develop the most serious illnesses, encephalitis and meningitis.

There have even been reports of medical opinion that children might develop immunity to WNV. Mr. Dickhout states: "Anybody in good health could be exposed to West Nile virus and build some immunity. But there's no data yet that could support this."

Which precautions you should take to prevent your child's exposure to WNV is a decision you should make in consultation with your physician, advises Mr. Dickhout. A child with a weakened immune system may be better off avoiding any exposure. For the child of average health, the precautions of reduction of possible breeding sites in your yard, and protection with clothing and insect repellent, should be adequate.

Another comforting fact may be that not all mosquitoes are likely to be a danger. Conservation Halton points out that there are 57 kinds of mosquitoes in Ontario. Only a small number contribute to the spread of WNV and, of those, it's only the females that require blood for their eggs.

Yet it's best to protect children from all mosquitoes by dressing them in light-coloured, substantial long-sleeved tops and pants, socks, shoes and a hat. Mosquitoes can sting through hair.

As for repellents, use those containing DEET, but for children, only if there's a high risk of com-

plications from insect bites and only in concentrations of up to 10 per cent. This will protect for roughly three hours. Babies younger than six months should not be treated with any DEET repellents. Fine netting can cover strollers and playpens to protect infants. Children aged six months to two years may receive a slight application of repellent once a day. Children aged two to 12 years may receive a slight application three times a day. DEET should never be applied to children's faces or hands. "The problem with DEET is not absorption," explains Mr. Dickhout, "but ingestion. Like sunscreen lotion, it's not good to ingest any chemical."

If chemical use for children needs caution, what are the effects of larvicides? Again, the exact answers are unknown.

"The improper use of pesticides may kill more people than West Nile virus does," said Bob Morris, a biologist with Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) at a public meeting in Acton in May.

Various bodies of water throughout Halton are being tested for mosquito larvae and, where they are found, larvicide may be added to prevent mosquitoes from hatching. Catch basins in urban areas are the most common breeding sites for mosquitoes, and, to control them, the Health Department has chosen the use of methoprene. This is more effective in siltcatch basins than is another larvicide, known as Bti, which only works in clear water for a short time. Methoprene can be toxic to some aquatic life. For this reason, the Health Department sees the need to monitor for any negative impacts on fish and other aquatic life.

"Methoprene will eventually wash into Lake Ontario," said Mr. Morris. "CVC will measure methoprene damage to the environment."

The last resort is to spray pesticides in the air in an attempt to control adult mosquitoes. "Mass spraying would only be done if there is a large possible exposure of the virus to humans," says Mr. Dickhout. "At present we have no intention of spraying adulticides. We hope that larvicide will control West Nile virus."

Still, adults should be alert to their children's health. "Contact a doctor immediately if a child develops symptoms such as high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, severe headaches, stiff neck, or if his or her eyes become sensitive to light," warns a Health Department fact sheet.

# TALK of the TOWN

A monthly feature from the Town of Milton

## New Swimming Pool Fencing Regulations

The swimming pool season is here once again and safety is of the utmost importance. If you are considering the purchase and installation of a new swimming pool this year here is information you need to be aware of. On May 26, 2003 Council passed municipal By-law # 80-2003 which requires and regulates fencing to be erected and maintained around swimming pools on private property within the Town.

Other highlights that are detailed in this new By-law include -

- Minimum permitted height of fence - 1.2m (4ft.).
- Maximum permitted height of fence - 2.0m (6ft. 6in.).
- Illustrations of fence types.
- Setbacks for pools and related equipment is subject to the Town's Zoning By-law.
- Issuing swimming pool fence enclosure permits is subject to obtaining a clearance letter from your developer or compliance with Town's Site Alteration and Top Soil Preservation By-law. This depends on the location of your property within the Town.
- Hot tubs and Jacuzzis are included in the definition of a "swimming pool".
- Previous exemption process is no longer available.



Copies of this new By-law may be obtained from the Planning and Development Department - Building Section, and a revised pool owner's guide will soon be available on the Town's website. For inquiries, please call 905 878-7252 ext. 2397

## Plans are Underway for the Second Phase of Town Growth

Growth planning within the Town of Milton continues with the development of a Secondary Plan for the Phase II Residential Area, known as the Sherwood Survey. This area is located to the west of Regional Road #25, and will be bound by a new road, Louis St. Laurent Avenue which will be built between Derry and Britannia Roads to the south, Tremaine Road to the west and Highway 401 to the north, including a portion of the Milton Heights area. It may also include a portion within the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area known as the Milton West Special Study Area, but this area is subject to separate approval by the Joint Ontario Municipal/Assessment Board.

A secondary plan arranges how land can be used at a fairly detailed level and identifies which land areas are designated for residential dwellings, schools, parks, and commercial conveniences. To date, conceptual land use alternatives and related background studies have been prepared and presented to the public and Council through a series of public open houses and meetings.

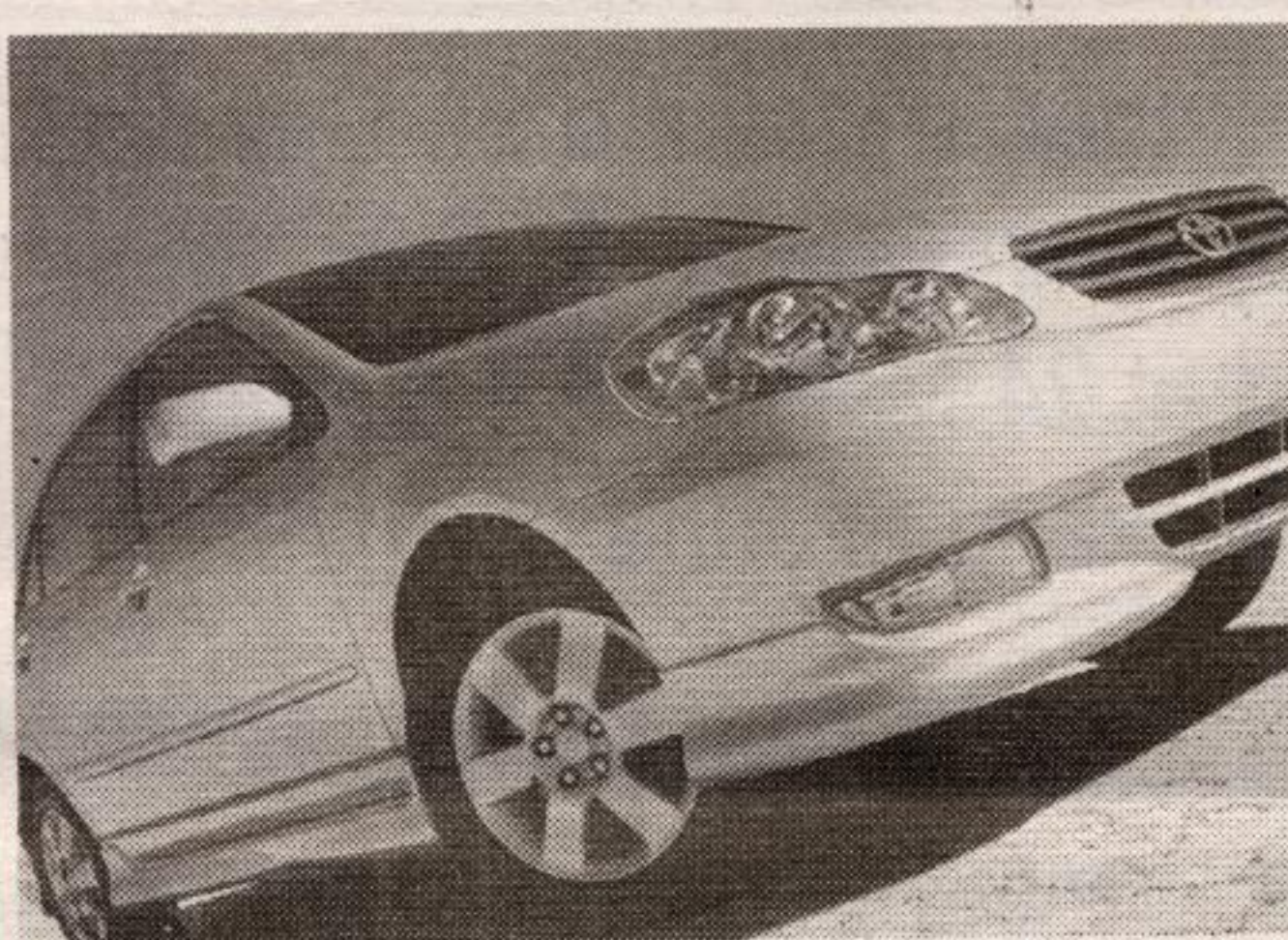
The next public Open House and Statutory Meeting will provide an opportunity for the general public and government agencies to voice comments and concerns with respect to the preferred land use options. The Open House will be held in the lobby at Town Hall on Monday, June 23, 2003 from 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. followed by the meeting, which will be held in the Council Chambers starting at 7:30 p.m. You can review copies of the Draft Secondary Plan and Related Studies at the Milton Planning and Development Department and the Milton Public Library.

Following receipt of public and agency input, staff will be revising the secondary plan and, at the same time, will be initiating financial negotiations with the relevant landowner/developers with respect to servicing, transportation, parks and other development costs. A phasing scheme will also be developed, in consultation with the Region of Halton, as the Region is responsible for the provision of water/wastewater servicing capacity and the regional transportation network. Subject to a number of considerations, it is anticipated that the Secondary Plan will be brought before Council for adoption in September of this year.

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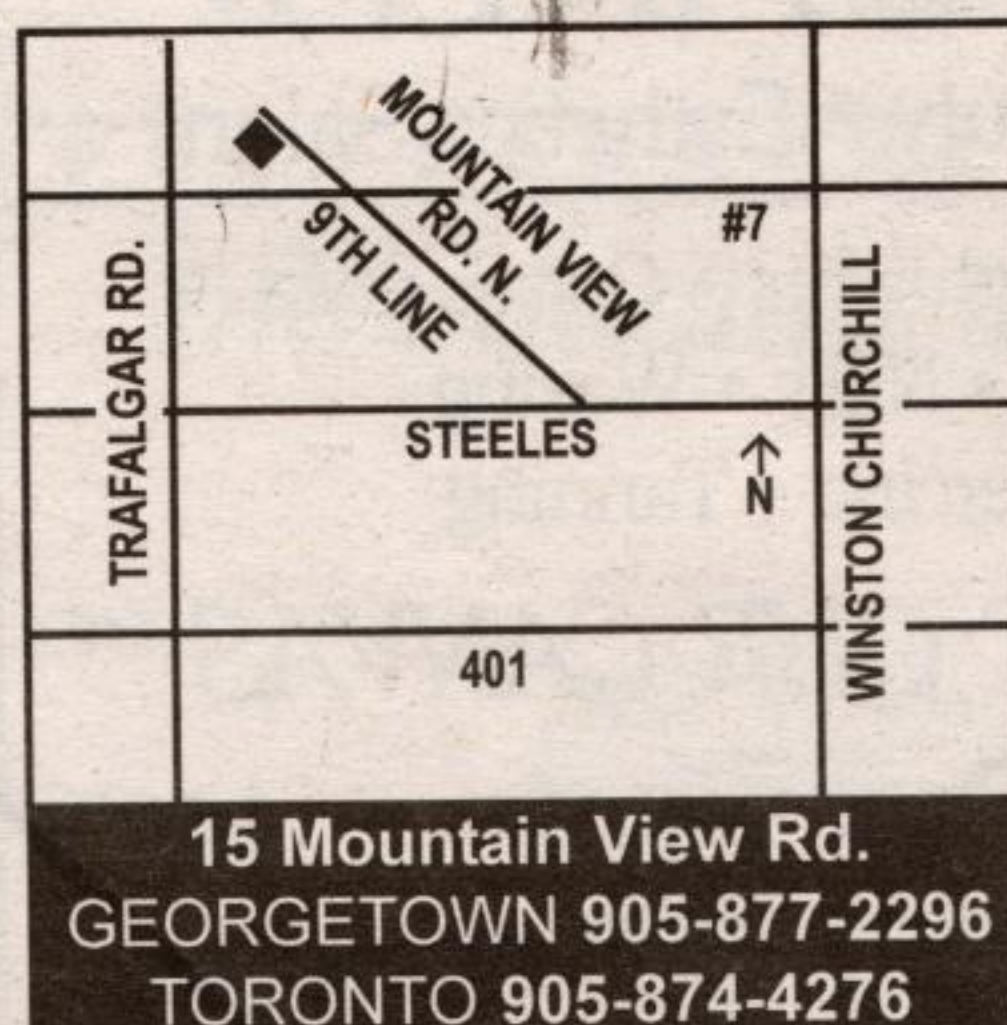
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