

# Comment

## West Nile still threat

Despite the good news that no Halton residents have been diagnosed with the West Nile virus this year, regional health officials warn this year's greatest risk could arrive in the next few weeks.

Halton's Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal says the greatest potential for people in the region to become infected with the virus will occur between now and mid-to-late September, before cooler weather renders mosquitoes inactive.

Dr. Nosal emphasized the importance of residents being especially vigilant about avoiding mosquito bites at this time of the year.

Tips offered by Halton's health department include avoiding places where mosquito populations are high, taking extra precautions at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active and wearing light-coloured clothing that reduces the amount of exposed skin.

While Halton has avoided human cases of the West Nile virus for the last two years, health officials in nearby Toronto and Peel have confirmed cases of people

contracting the virus this summer.

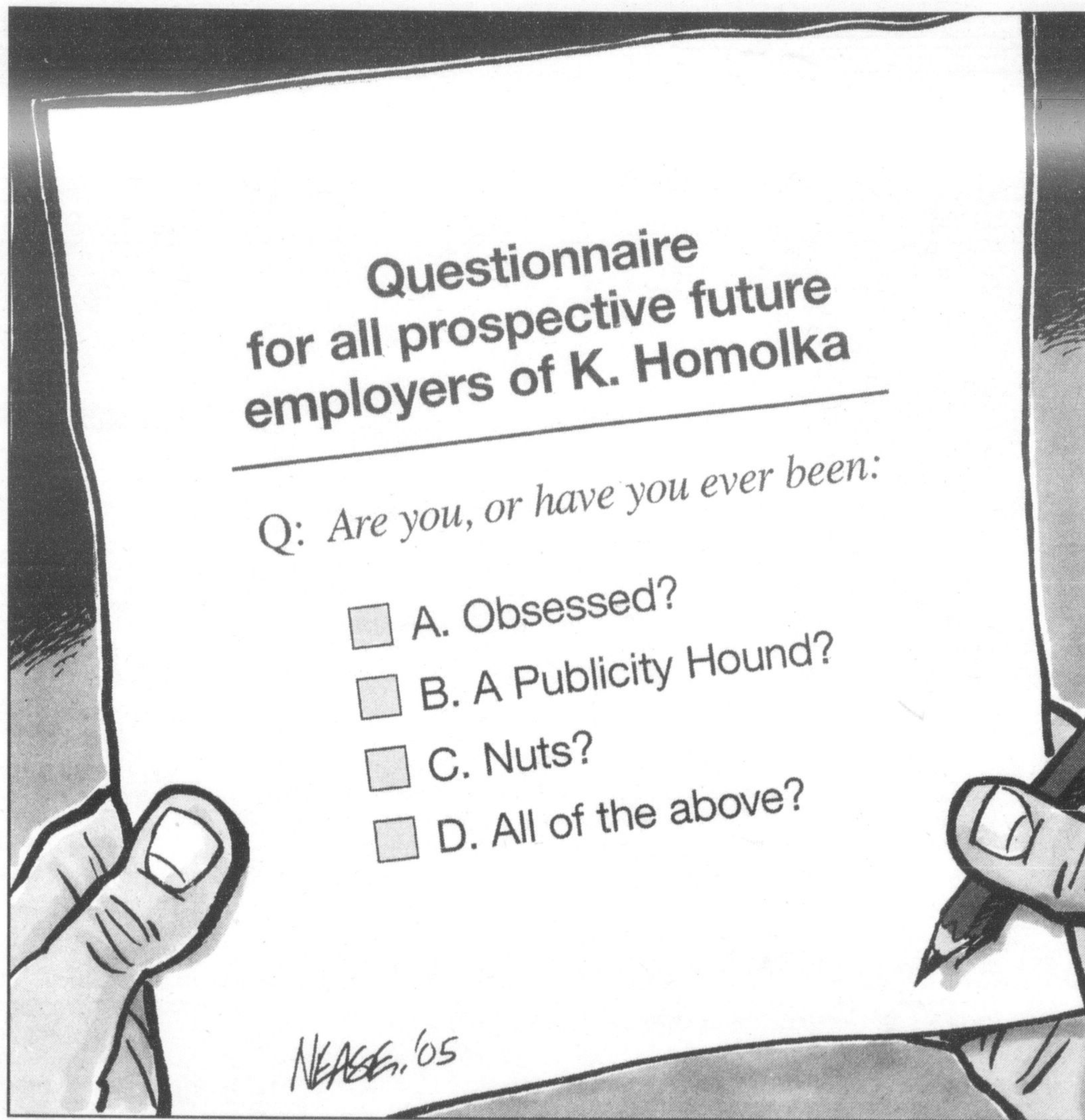
Dr. Nosal believes these cases indicate that the risk to Halton residents is still very real.

While in most cases people infected by the virus show no symptoms, others may develop a fever, headache, muscle aches and rash. In rare cases, patients can become seriously ill and even die from West Nile.

This year the virus has already been detected in the bird population of each of Halton's four municipalities.

South Halton still seems to be the hot spot for the virus with Burlington and Oakville accounting for 11 of the 13 birds that have tested positive for West Nile. Also, a total of 15 mosquito pools in Halton's two largest communities have tested positive for the virus.

The combination of a strong health prevention message from Halton's health department and a pro-active approach to testing mosquitoes for West Nile and larviciding larger mosquito pools appears to be working.



## Our Readers Write

### Theft of son's bike shameful and upsetting

Dear Editor:

This letter is directed to the boy who took my son's bike August 21.

Could you please return it? Hopefully the stories you told the other neighbourhood kids are untrue and that the bike hasn't been destroyed and dumped. If the stories are true, was it really worth it?

This bike may have meant nothing to you but it was a special present I gave to my son last year to let him know how proud I am of him.

I'm a single parent and since my children and I have only my income to support us, the bike can't be easily replaced.

Although to you it was just a bike, to my son it was his bike and you should have respected that. You may not be reading this, but hopefully your parents are and maybe they will question where the yellow Sportek 'Villain' bike — or at least its parts — came from.

**Peggy Cahoon**  
Woodward Avenue

### Enthusiasia wasn't being advocated in letter

Dear Editor:

I'm writing to clarify my position in response to a letter to the editor in the August 19 Champion regarding the recent attack by a German shepherd on a bichon frise.

The letter suggested that I was advocating the euthanizing of the German shepherd.

From my research, dogs use their bites for many purposes, including for play and self defense. The Champion's article described a first-hand account of a prey hold and head shake. This is the most serious type of bite, since it's meant to do serious damage or to kill.

The owner of the German shepherd didn't seem to realize the seriousness of the incident or the force of the attack, describing it as just a bite and normal dog behaviour. She also didn't seem to realize that she was totally unable to control her dog without physical restraint, or that the dog's aggression wasn't justified by the situation.

From the photograph of the

injured dog, it was apparent that the injuries weren't merely puncture wounds that would have resulted from a bite but consisted of several long gashes.

From my research, these injuries were more consistent with avulsion or tearing of the flesh that results from a prey hold and head shake. From the story, it appeared that the attack was unprovoked and wasn't preceded by any warning display such as freezing, barring of teeth or snapping — although it difficult to say if the account was complete.

The owner seemed to justify the dog's aggression by mentioning that Emma often barked at her dog. Like biting, barking is also a natural dog behaviour, especially for a young dog like Emma.

My original letter was intended to draw the German shepherd owner's attention to the physical evidence of the injuries and urge her to seek help for the dog before the aggression escalated any further.

There are many books and

resources available to help owners understand dog behaviour and prevent serious biting. One suggestion is to change to a solid board fence or create a secure dog run in a quiet area where the pet wouldn't be frustrated by passing pets or people.

There are many places in the area that offer dog obedience courses to treat cases of aggression.

Euthanasia should be considered a last resort in the treatment of dog aggression. I consider euthanasia to be appropriate in cases where a dog kills livestock or other pets since there are few people who have the skills to resocialize and rehabilitate an animal once its instinctive predatory behaviour has taken hold.

The fact that the German shepherd didn't kill Emma suggests that it may not be experienced in killing and that there's still a chance to restrain the dog. I would urge the German shepherd's owner to give her dog that opportunity.

**Sophie Cheney**  
Campbellville

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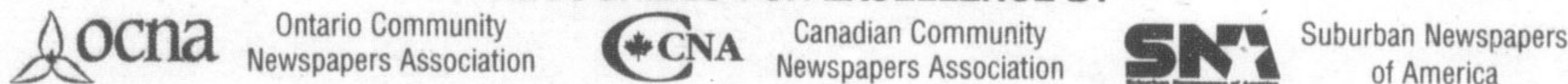
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