

NO REPORTED CASES OF WEST NILE VIRUS IN YORK REGION

# Health unit issues caution on virus

BY DAWN LIERSCH  
Staff Writer

York Region health officials are warning residents to watch for dead birds and to protect themselves from mosquitoes while travelling as the threat of the West Nile virus moves closer to home.

In a media advisory released Friday, York Region Health Services reported the West Nile virus, which can be transmitted by mosquitoes from birds to humans, has been identified in several American states, including Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts and New York, most recently in Buffalo.

### AMERICAN INCIDENTS

Because of the close proximity of Ontario to Buffalo and the similar climate conditions, there is a possibility local migratory birds that spent the winter in the U.S. may have been infected by mosquitoes and returned to the province, the advisory warned.

But Faron Kolbe, manager of infectious diseases with York Region Health Services, recently told the Economist & Sun/Tribune protective measures have been set up in Ontario for months with hope that, should the virus arrive here, it will be detected before there are problems.

"The risk of West Nile virus is remote, but the possibility is there. We want to be prepared," he said.

Kolbe said health officials have been monitoring chicken coops in six areas of the province since June, testing the chickens' blood for the virus and collecting mosquitoes with light traps to determine whether the culex mosquito that carries the virus has entered Ontario. Sites include Brockville, Picton, Guelph, Niagara, Long Point and Point Pelee.

Preventive spraying programs aimed at suppressing mosquitoes are also being conducted in areas in the U.S. where the virus has been identified.

Surveillance procedures have also been conducted in 59 Ontario hospitals since July, in which hospitals are to report to health officials any suspected cases of West Nile virus.

Symptoms of the virus include fever, headaches and body aches. The elderly and young children are most at risk of dying from the virus.

York residents are also being asked to report any dead birds — excluding pigeons, doves, seagulls, starlings and grackles — that have not died from natural causes such as flying into a window, hitting a car or being killed by predatory animals, according to York Region Health Services.

Margaret McCaffrey, a health inspector and educator with York Region Health Services, said crows and bluejays are most susceptible to the virus.

She stressed residents should report dead bird sightings only if the birds died recently and appear to have died from unusual causes. They'll then be sent to a laboratory in Guelph for tests.

### NEUROLOGICAL PROBLEMS

"We're looking for birds exhibiting neurological problems," she said.

McCaffrey said 350 birds from Ontario have been tested so far, 31 of those being from York Region. No birds have tested positive for the virus to date, she said.

Although people can't catch the virus from the birds, she warned them to first call the health unit with any dead bird sightings before moving them.

If health officials can't immediately respond to pick up the dead bird, it should be picked up using gloves, double-bagged and stored in a cooler or freezer.

For more information, or to report a dead bird sighting, call York Region Health Services at 895-4511.

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### REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK PUBLIC MEETING

The Regional Municipality of York invites members of the public to review and provide comments on the Draft Report and Recommendations of a Human Services Strategy for York Region.

Human Services are the programs and services that support a safe, healthy community and maintain and promote its quality of life.

Dates and Locations:

MUNICIPALITY	DATE	TIME	LOCATION
Newmarket	Tuesday, August 15th	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Town of Newmarket Offices (Cane Room) 395 Mulock Drive, Newmarket
Markham	Thursday, August 17th	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Town of Markham Offices (Canada Room) 101 Town Centre Blvd., Markham
Georgina	Tuesday, August 22nd	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Sutton Public Library 5279 Black River Rd., Sutton
City of Vaughan	Thursday, August 24th	7:00-9:00 p.m.	City of Vaughan Offices (Council Chambers) 2141 Major Mackenzie Dr., Vaughan

For further information, please call the Human Services Strategy Project Office at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 1216 or visit the [www.region.york.on.ca](http://www.region.york.on.ca).

The Human Services Strategy is an initiative of the Regional Municipality of York with funding assistance provided in part by Human Resources Development Canada.


