

Eighty dead birds checked for West Nile virus in York Region

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However, the virus can cause rashes, stiff neck and muscle weakness in some victims, especially the elderly, children or people with weakened immune systems.

In rare cases, the disease may result in encephalitis, inflammation of the brain and spinal cord.

The virus was first identified in 1937 in the west Nile area of Uganda.

Two years ago, it was found in and around New York City. Sixty-two people contracted the virus and seven victims died.

Last year, there were 21 confirmed cases, including two deaths, in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Last summer, the virus was detected just across the border in Buffalo.

CALL HOTLINE

Since last year, York public health officials have been urging residents who find dead birds to call a hotline so the birds can be taken away and tested.

About 80 birds have been examined this summer, but Herrick said none was carrying the virus.

The birds considered most

susceptible to the disease include crows, blue jays, grey jays, ravens, magpies, eagles, hawks, falcons and owls.

Herrick said there are precautions residents can take to minimize their risk of contracting the virus from mosquitoes including:

- Minimizing the time spent outdoors from dusk to dawn because that is when mosquitoes are most active;

- Wearing light-coloured clothing to avoid attracting the insects;

- Wearing clothing with a tight knit to help prevent mosquitoes penetrating the material;

- Wearing long pants, long-sleeved shirts, shoes and socks while outdoors;

- Using insect repellent containing DEET when at risk of mosquito contact;

- Ensuring all door and window screens on your home and cottage are in good repair;

- Eliminating stagnant water on your property that can collect in tires, pots and pool covers;

- Changing birdbath water twice a week; and,

- Ensuring roof gutters are clean and flow properly.

For more information, or to report a dead bird, call 1-800-361-5653 or (905) 895-8004.



TROY HERRICK: Associate medical officer of health says there is no proof West Nile virus is in Ontario.

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