

Insect Repellent Use and Dead Crow Identification
Information Line, Option 3
May 18, 2004

West Nile Virus activity is already occurring in some parts of the country. As nice weather sets in, it is important to develop good warm weather habits. Put these three simple actions in place to help prevent infection in yourself and your family: avoid mosquito bites by using insect repellants with DEET and wear light, long-sleeved clothing; mosquito-proof your home by emptying standing water and installing screens; and last, report dead Crow sightings.

Female mosquitoes bite people and animals because they need the protein found in blood to help develop their eggs. Mosquitoes are attracted to people and animals by skin odors and carbon dioxide from breath.

Many repellents contain a chemical N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide - more commonly known as DEET – which repels the mosquito, making the person unattractive for feeding. DEET does not kill mosquitoes; it just makes them unable to locate us. Insect repellents can reduce the risk of mosquito bites, but they must be used with caution.

DEET comes in many different concentrations, with percentages as low as five percent or as high as 100 percent. Products containing higher concentrations of DEET provide longer protection from mosquito bites than those containing lesser concentration. When choosing a repellent use one that provides protection for the amount of time that you will be outdoors. A higher percentage of DEET should be used if you will be outdoors for several hours while a lower percentage of DEET can be used if time outdoors will be limited. You can also re-apply a product if you are outdoors for a longer time than expected. Frequent reuse or saturation is unnecessary for effectiveness. Use only what and how much you need for your situation.

Products containing DEET are very safe when used according to the directions. Because DEET is so widely used, a great deal of testing has been done. When manufacturers seek registration with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for products such as DEET, laboratory testing regarding both short-term and long-term health effects must be carried out. Over the long history of DEET use, very few confirmed incidents of toxic reactions to DEET have occurred when the product is used properly.

A general consideration to remember when using products that contain DEET is to always follow the recommendations that appear on the products label.

- Use enough repellent to cover exposed skin or clothing. Don't apply repellent to skin that is under clothing.
- Store out of the reach of children. When using repellent on a child, apply it to your own hands and then rub them on your child. Do NOT allow children to

- apply DEET to themselves. Avoid putting repellent on children's hands (Children tend to put their hands in their mouth and rub their eyes.)
- Do not apply aerosol or pump products directly to your face. Spray your hands and then rub them carefully over the face, avoiding the eyes, nose and mouth.
 - Do NOT apply repellents in enclosed areas.
 - Do NOT use on skin that is damaged by sunburn, cuts, rashes or skin conditions, such as psoriasis or acne.
 - DEET may be applied to clothing, but may damage some synthetic fabrics and plastics.
 - Wash treated skin with soap and water after returning indoors. Launder treated clothes separately.

Remember, the use of DEET is only one way to reduce the risk of mosquito bites. The Broome County Health Department also encourages other precautions - such as wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts when in areas of high mosquito activity. Also, eliminate items on your property in which standing water can collect and serve as a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

One of the earliest indications of WNV in an area is Dead Crow sightings. This year, Dr. Anne Clark, Associate Professor of Biological Sciences, at Binghamton University will be conducting research on ill Crow behavior and will be collecting ill and dead Crow, or Blue Jay, reports from residents. Broome County residents can report ill or dead crows by contacting Dr. Clark at Binghamton University by telephone at 777-6228 or e-mail at crowsch@binghamton.edu.

The American or Common Crow is a large, chunky, completely black bird that measures between 17 and 21 inches from the tip of the bill to the tip of the tail. Crows have a wide, thick black beak. Grackles, blackbirds and starlings are often mistaken for crows but all three are less than half the size of crows. Residents can report other types of dead birds to the United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Service Hotline toll free, at 1-866-537-2473. As in past years, not all birds will be collected and tested. Bird specimens collected and calls reporting dead birds will be recorded for research purposes only.

Live or dead birds that are found pose no immediate health threat to the public or to pets. These calls do not require an emergency response. If possible, cover the bird with a bucket or box. If directions on what to do with the bird cannot be obtained from Dr. Clark, use gloves or a shovel to place the bird in the regular garbage.

For general information on West Nile Virus, call the Broome County information line at 778-3911, Option 4, or visit the Broome County Health Department website at www.gobroomecounty.com/safety.