

Why the City of Burleson does not spray for mosquitoes

West Nile virus (WNV) is an infectious disease that can be spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. WNV first appeared in the in the United States in 1999 and in Texas in 2002. West Nile Virus has been identified in mosquito samples in the City of Burleson.

Because the virus has been identified nearby, it is important that residents understand their vital role in protecting themselves from the threat of infection.

Most people (about 4 out of 5) who are infected with West Nile virus will not develop any type of illness (an asymptomatic infection). Approximately 20% of people who become infected with WNV will develop West Nile fever. In extreme cases, West Nile virus causes inflammation of the brain. Serious illness can occur in people of any age; however, people over age 50 and some immunocompromised people (for example, transplant patients) are at the highest risk for getting severely ill when infected with WNV.

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS), there is no need for panic. West Nile has not been as deadly as St. Louis encephalitis, another mosquito-borne illness that has been in Texas for years.

Nevertheless, there have been deaths in the United States and one death is too many.

The City of Burleson's environmental services division, along with the Tarrant County Public Health Department (TCPH) are collaboratively conducting surveillance for mosquito-borne illnesses. Together, these organizations are working hard to lessen the impact of the disease on Burleson residents.

While surveillance and education continues, a critical question arises: what will have the greatest impact in reducing the threat of human exposure to mosquito-borne illnesses: spraying by the City or source reduction and personal protection by residents?

While some welcome spraying for mosquitoes, the fact is that spraying will not eliminate the threat of mosquito-borne illnesses. Spraying for mosquitoes has one positive impact-- temporary reduction in the number of adult mosquitoes in the immediate vicinity. But similar to some medications, the toxins used in spraying may have side effects that generally outweigh the limited positive impacts.

First, spraying chemicals in the streets will not rid the city of mosquitoes. The chemical must make contact with the insect to kill it, making it difficult to destroy

mosquitoes hiding in grass, bushes, trees or backyards. Moreover, the chemicals have no residual effects and do nothing to kill mosquito larva thriving in stagnant water.

Second, spraying for mosquitoes may give residents a false sense of security. The risk of someone being infected with West Nile might then increase if fewer people decide not to use insect repellent before working or playing outdoors.

Third, adding harmful chemicals to the environment can have unwanted secondary effects to both air and water.

Lastly, there are many Burleson residents living with respiratory problems such as asthma who would be in danger of an onset of symptoms. The potential inhalation hazard to the general population does not seem worth the risk of killing a few mosquitoes.

All things considered, residents are better positioned to reduce the likelihood of human exposure to West Nile. Until such time when the pros of spraying outweigh the cons, Burleson will continue to promote the importance of the residents' role in preventing mosquitoes at their source--stagnant water--and in protecting themselves from mosquitoes by wearing appropriate clothing and insect repellent outdoors.

It takes three to seven days for thousands of mosquitoes to develop in stagnant water. Anything outdoors that holds water--old tires, outside pet water bowls, unkempt pools, birdbaths, potted plants or clogged rain gutters--is a potential breeding place for mosquitoes.

Residents should be aware that the state health department is no longer collecting dead birds. According to the CDC, there is no evidence that humans can get WNV from infected birds. Therefore, residents should properly dispose of dead birds by wrapping them in newspaper and placing them in a plastic garbage bag. They should never directly handle animal carcasses and should always wash their hands with soap and water afterwards.

Combating the problems of mosquitoes and WNV is a community effort. With residents and City staff working together, the Burleson community can effectively control the mosquito population and minimize exposure to WNV. The City, county and state are doing their part by monitoring for West Nile and providing residents with the information they need to protect themselves. Now it's the residents' responsibility to use that information. By taking simple precautions, residents can make a much greater impact on mosquitoes and the threat of West Nile than any mosquito fogger.

For more information or to report stagnant water, please contact the environmental programs specialist at 817-447-5410, ext. 269, or e-mail bchafin@burlesontx.com.

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What can you do to prevent WNV?

The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites.

Protect Yourself

- Use mosquito repellents when necessary and follow label directions and precautions closely.
- Use head nets, long sleeves and long pants if you venture into areas with high mosquito populations.
- Stay inside during the evening when mosquitoes are most active.
- Make sure window and door screens are "bug tight."
- Replace your outdoor lights with yellow "bug" lights.

Eliminate Standing Water

- Empty standing water in old tires, cemetery urns, buckets, plastic covers, toys, or any other container where "wigglers" and "tumblers" live.
- Empty and change the water in bird baths, fountains, wading pools, rain barrels, and potted plant trays at least once a week if not more often.
- Fill holes where water may become stagnant with dirt to prevent temporary pools.
- Keep swimming pools treated and circulating, repair leaky pipes, and keep rain gutters unclogged.

For information about West Nile Virus, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/wnv_factsheet.htm