



Preparing for West Nile Virus 2004

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It's hard to believe that mosquito season will soon be upon us again. We all know how quickly Manitoba winters pass by, so it is timely to be planning and discussing West Nile Virus (WNV).

It is predicted that WNV will be present in Manitoba in 2004. The overall anticipated

risk of a person contracting WNV is still relatively low but remains unpredictable. The year 2003 brought the first human cases of West Nile Virus in Manitoba. While we continue to learn much about this disease, the 2003 surveillance system in Manitoba demonstrated some important findings:

- Like 2002, WNV was detected in southern Manitoba in 2003. (Please see the Manitoba Health web site at www.gov.mb.ca for maps).

- Corvid (crows and other related birds) surveillance provided an early indication of WNV activity in Manitoba. The first positive corvid was identified in mid June, approximately 2 weeks prior to the date of first possible exposure of the earliest human case.

- Increases in numbers of the mosquito carrying WNV, known as *Culex tarsalis*, and their infection rates, corresponded to exposure times of the majority of human cases. Human exposure to WNV appears to have occurred between early July and early September, with the majority of cases being exposed in early August.

- Mapping and larva sampling of *Culex tarsalis* mosquito breeding habitats provide information about the presence of larvae and help to determine the sites to larvicide.

- Piles of old tires and water in other containers are very effective breeders of *Culex* mosquitoes.

- Human cases occurred throughout southern Manitoba. Southwestern Manitoba had the greatest number of cases per population.

Status of planning for 2004

Throughout the past several months, Manitoba Health has been working with partners to develop a West Nile Virus plan for 2004. The data collected from 2003 surveillance activities, as well as input received from others involved with the program, including municipalities, Regional Health Authorities,

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other departments and organizations, and national partners, has informed the planning for 2004. Manitoba Health will be finalizing the plan in the very near future and will once again produce a planning document for municipalities that will outline roles, responsibilities, and activities regarding the 2004 program, including information on cost shared funding for mosquito control.

Personal protection and source reduction

Personal protection remains the most effective way for an individual to reduce their risk of WNV. Manitobans are encouraged to use DEET based repellants, wear long sleeved, light colored, loose fitting clothing, and reduce time spent outdoors between dusk and dawn. Reducing sources of standing water where *Culex tarsalis* breed is also important.

How can municipalities prepare for the 2004 WNV season?

- **Identify a lead contact on WNV issues.**

This person will be the one who will be contacted by WNV Program staff about issues related to WNV throughout the season.

- **Become familiar with the WNV program.** Take advantage of pamphlets and the planning document for municipalities (these will be available soon) and become familiar with where to refer residents to get more information.

- **Identify known locations of risk and evaluate your municipality with regard to the potential for mosquito control.** Municipalities know their own communities best and can therefore begin to identify known areas of risk, (e.g. tire disposal sites, permanent standing water). More information on this will be available in the municipal planning guide.

- **Take opportunities to build capacity.**

Building municipal capacity to undertake activities such as larval sampling and larviciding will increase the overall capacity of Manitoba to respond to and reduce the risk of WNV in the province.

Next steps

As indicated, Manitoba Health will be finalizing the 2004 WNV plan in the very near future and will once again produce a planning document for municipalities that will outline roles, responsibilities, and activities regarding the program, including information on cost shared funding for mosquito control.

Manitoba looks forward to continued work and partnerships with municipalities and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities on the issue of West Nile Virus throughout the 2004 season. ●

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