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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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WEST NILE VIRUS DETECTED IN OHIO COUNTY

WHEELING, WV – Mosquitoes carrying West Nile virus have been found in **six locations** in Ohio County, according to the Wheeling-Ohio County Health Department.

The recent detection is part of a county wide West Nile surveillance program that is actively trapping mosquitoes that will be tested for West Nile, La Crosse Encephalitis, Eastern Equine Encephalitis and Saint Louis Encephalitis. Trapping began in early July, 2009.

Mosquitoes carry the virus to humans from infected birds. Most people who get West Nile virus never become ill, but some may develop a serious infection. Symptoms from the virus include fever, headache, body aches, fatigue, confusion, weakness, nausea, vomiting and stiff neck.

West Nile virus was identified in Africa in 1937, but wasn't brought to North America until 1999, when it was detected in New York City. West Virginia's first human case was found in 2002. West Virginia has always had a low incidence of human West Nile disease, with only seven cases reported from 2002-2008.

Besides West Nile virus, the Health Department reminds residents that mosquitoes also can carry the encephalitis virus, which is most common in children under 16 and includes symptoms such as fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness and disorientation. West Virginia annually has one of the highest La Crosse encephalitis rates in the nation.

West Nile virus cases occur primarily in the summer and fall, so the time to take action is now. “You can reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home and neighborhood by emptying standing or stagnant water from cans, bottles, old tires, wading pools, flower pots, and other containers,” said Dr William C. Mercer, Health Officer for the Wheeling-Ohio County Health Department. “You can also clean out clogged gutters and drill holes in the bottom of recycling containers to eliminate mosquito breeding habitats. In addition, making sure that all

windows have proper screens to help keep mosquitoes out of your home.”

The most important factor for the mosquito season is that mosquito populations can be reduced or eliminated by removing all potential places for standing water – bird baths, pet bowls, tires, pots, cans or even bottle caps. There is no container too small when it comes to potential breeding grounds for mosquitoes that carry the West Nile virus.

West Nile virus may be spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. They cannot be spread from casual human to human contact. When outdoors during mosquito season, people can protect themselves by being properly clothed in long, loose and light colored clothing and by using mosquito repellants. Mosquito repellants should be used according to the manufacturer’s recommendations.

This year the Wheeling-Ohio County Health Department will continue to monitor West Nile activity with mosquito and dead bird surveillance. Residents who see a dead bird should contact their county health department. Dead birds can only testing if they have been dead for less than 24 hours and do not show any signs of decay. Bird carcasses that are soft or mushy, have an obvious odor, skin discoloration, feathers or skin that rubs off easily, or have ants or maggots are too decomposed for testing. Birds can be tested for West Nile at the West Virginia Office of Laboratory Services.

For more information contact the Wheeling-Ohio County Health Department at (304) 234-3682 or visit our website at www.ohiocountyhealth.com. You can also visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website www.cdc.gov.

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