



## West Nile Virus

# Dead Birds

**Q: How are birds involved in the transmission of the West Nile virus?**

**A:** Birds become infected through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can transmit West Nile virus to humans.

**Q: What is the significance of dead birds?**

**A:** In 2000, the number of dead birds found in a county was strongly associated with areas of increased West Nile virus activity. However, since birds can die of many different causes, finding one or more dead birds does not necessarily mean that the virus is present in that bird, or in that area. It is, therefore, extremely important that all dead birds be reported to the health department so that we can evaluate whether there is, indeed, evidence of West Nile virus in the county.

**Q: Can I get West Nile virus from an infected bird?**

**A:** There is currently no evidence to suggest that people can become infected through contact with an infected bird. However, because birds can carry other diseases that can be acquired by people, it is best to minimize contact with sick or dead wild birds, and have sick pet birds evaluated promptly by a veterinarian.

**Q: If I see a dead bird, what should I do?**

**A:** Report all dead bird sightings, especially crows and blue jays. This will assist us in our efforts to monitor possible West Nile virus activity. However, while every report is important to our monitoring efforts, we will be collecting only a sample of the dead birds and *not* every dead bird reported. The health department does not pick up the dead birds; that will be arranged with animal control officers. If animal control does not collect the bird for testing, use gloves to carefully place dead birds in double-plastic bags and then place in the outdoor trash.

**Q: How do I dispose of a dead bird?**

**A:** As dead birds can carry a variety of diseases, they should never be handled with bare hands. Either use disposable gloves to carefully place the bird in a double plastic bag, or use a double plastic bag as a glove to pick up the bird, then tie off the bag and place it in the outdoor trash.

**Q: Where did the West Nile virus come from?**

**A:** Outbreaks of the West Nile virus have occurred before in Africa, Egypt, Israel, Asia, Romania, Russia and France. Before 1999, the West Nile virus had never before been found in the Americas. The most likely explanation is that the virus was introduced by an infected bird that was imported or an infected person returning from a country where the virus is common.

If you have any questions about West Nile virus, please contact the Denton County Health Department at (940) 349-2909.