



**MILD WINTER = MORE MOSQUITOES = HIGHER RISK OF WNV**

With yet another mild winter behind us, this summer, like last year, is shaping up to be another season of mosquito proliferation, which means a higher risk to contract West Nile Virus (WNV). But before we either exaggerate or underestimate WNV’s public health threat, here are the facts:

**The Culprit**

It’s small but problematic – commonly known as the Southern House Mosquito, this little insect is mainly to blame for WNV in Texas. It breeds profusely in dirty water collections like stagnant drains, pooled water on the ground or in containers, ponds, etc. It can travel up to ½ mile and is most active from dusk till early morning.

**The Disease**

WNV is only spread to humans and animals by infected mosquito bites. Mosquitoes get WNV from biting infected birds. The severity of WNV varies individually – some people get it and don’t ever know it. Others experience flu-like symptoms, and the worst suffer neurologic complications like encephalitis or worse. Symptoms show usually between 3 to 14 days after a mosquito bite. There is no cure for WNV, and treatment is limited to relieving symptoms and rehabilitation in more severe cases.

**Warning Signs**

Infected mosquitoes. Period. Traps help us locate the insects responsible for WNV, which helps us determine where to focus mosquito eradication efforts. Dead birds and squirrels, while possibly indicative of areas with WNV activity and useful as historical data, don’t usually help effective immediate eradication actions. Likewise, tracking human cases is also iffy, unless an infected person never leaves his or her house – since we can be bitten anywhere we go, where we live may not mean much in tracking WNV.

**How We Win This One**

Ben Franklin was right – an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure (or in WNV cases, a pound of hoping we get better). In other words, avoid mosquito bites. Here’s how:

Cover up: Wear long sleeve tops, long pants and socks sprayed with mosquito repellent.

Spray yourself: Use a repellent containing DEET or other proven deterrents on outer clothing and exposed body parts. Never spray on skin under clothing. And always follow the spray directions – these sprays are safe when used correctly.

Dump and repair: Get rid of standing water around the outside of your home – even small amounts could become mosquito breeding grounds. Or treat water in ponds, fountains or bird baths with appropriate chemicals available at DIY stores. And repair or install window and door screens to keep mosquitoes out of the house.

**What About Spraying?**

Ground and/or aerial spraying are options if the number of infected mosquitoes found pose a public health risk. But ground spraying is limited in how far it can reach from the dispensing trucks on the street, and aerial spraying, in order to be effective, needs to be done on three consecutive nights for each round of spraying, and repeated every two weeks if infected mosquitoes are still present. Not to mention the millions of dollars it would cost for even one spray application. Bottom line? Spraying could help, but it won’t eliminate WNV.

**In Sum**

Your public health authorities are working together to minimize the WNV risks by closely monitoring our North Texas counties for the locations of infected mosquitoes, and eliminating these pests as best they can. But the first and best way to avoid WNV is self-prevention. Prevent mosquito breeding around your home, protect yourselves and avoid getting bitten – and you won’t have to worry about WNV this summer!