

# Pennsylvania Details Its Plan To Deal With West Nile Virus

**HARRISBURG** (Dauphin Co.) — On behalf of Gov. Tom Ridge, Pennsylvania state officials today announced that on April 3, the Commonwealth will launch its program to detect and control mosquitoes that carry the West Nile virus which struck New York last year.

"Although the West Nile virus has not been found in Pennsylvania, starting April 3 we will be ready in case the virus spreads into the Commonwealth," Department of Health Secretary Robert S. Zimmerman, Jr. said.

The departments of Health, Environmental Protection (DEP), Agriculture, Aging, and Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Fish and Boat and Game commissions will work together and with local governments to implement the comprehensive, statewide plan.

"Pennsylvania's plan has three parts public and professional education, surveillance and, if the surveillance program determines there is a risk, the control of mosquitoes that carry the virus," DEP Secretary James M. Seif said. "Through early detection and control, we believe we stand the best oppor-

tunity to prevent the virus from spreading."

DEP has been charged with the mosquito surveillance and control portion of the multi-agency effort to control disease outbreaks in Pennsylvania. Current plans call for DEP to establish more than 500 mosquito-monitoring sites across the Commonwealth to trap mosquitoes and sample mosquito larvae so they can be identified and analyzed.

The Department of Agriculture will be involved in monitoring birds, chickens, and horses for West Nile virus. The Department of Health will be working with physicians and other health care professionals to monitor public health through local outreach efforts with county and municipal health departments. If the virus is detected in mosquitoes or animals, a mosquito control program will be implemented to kill the infected mosquitoes.

"DEP will work with counties and local governments to provide 100 percent funding for local control programs," Seif said. "Once control programs have started, they will have to continue until the virus has been

controlled."

DEP also will work with the counties adjacent to New Jersey that are considered to be at higher risk to develop an early mosquito control program.

To help educate citizens, Pennsylvania's Physician General, Dr. Robert Muscalus, has prepared a message to residents and local governments about the potential for the appearance of West Nile virus in the state and the protective actions anyone can take to help prevent it.

"We must be aware of where water can collect and stagnate on our property, and do our best to keep these places free from standing water," said Physician General Robert S. Muscalus. "Mosquitoes can breed in four days in standing water in such places like flower pots, cans, birdbaths, small ponds, tires and other containers which do not provide drainage or movement of water. By preventing mosquitoes from breeding, residents can go a long way to protect their health."

A website containing basic information about West Nile virus — [www.WestNile.state.pa.us](http://www.WestNile.state.pa.us) — also has been established to provide citizens with background

information and regular updates. Visitors can log on and sign up to receive news releases and other updates on West Nile automatically by e-mail.

The West Nile virus is spread to people by the Northern house mosquito infected with the virus. It was previously only found in Africa, Eastern Europe and West Asia.

Mosquitoes acquire the virus from infected birds and horses. Those mosquitoes then transmit the virus to people and other animals. West Nile virus, when transmitted to humans can cause West Nile Encephalitis. West Nile Encephalitis is an infection that can cause an inflammation of the brain.

People older than 50 years of age have the highest risk of developing severe illness because, as people age, their bodies have a harder time fighting off disease. People with compromised immune systems also are at risk. However, anyone can get the virus.

Gov. Ridge's 2000-01 budget proposes \$9.8 million in new funding to prevent and mitigate the potential public-health effects of West Nile virus on citi-

zens of the Commonwealth. The funds will provide necessary staffing and an improved epidemiological infrastructure to detect the virus should it find its way into Pennsylvania.

In New York City last summer, seven of the 61 people infected with the virus died. All of the people who died from the virus were 75 or older. Birds that tested positive for West Nile virus were found last summer in New Jersey, New York and Maryland.

New York City, New Jersey, and Connecticut successfully sprayed pesticides to kill infected mosquitoes and stopped further spread of the 1999 disease outbreak.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are working with a group of 14 states including Pennsylvania believed to have some risk of seeing the virus this summer to develop a cooperative program of surveillance.

For more information on the West Nile virus, visit the Pennsylvania website at [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us) or [www.WestNile.state.pa.us](http://www.WestNile.state.pa.us).



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Becky Wingert holding Megan, 9 months; Emuly, 4 years old standing in front, Mike Wingert holding Ryan, 2 years old. Menno Sollenberger, 6 year technician from Franklin County

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