

# Pennsylvania Launches West Nile Virus Surveillance Program

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — State officials recently launched Pennsylvania's program to detect and control mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus, announcing \$3.3 million in grants to counties for mosquito surveillance and control.

"West Nile virus was detected in Pennsylvania for the first time last year," Health Secretary Robert S. Zimmerman Jr., said. "Fortunately, no person here was diagnosed with the virus. But last year's experience makes it clear that Pennsylvania's surveillance efforts must continue."

Last year, West Nile virus was found in 19 counties: Bucks; Bradford; Chester; Cumberland; Dauphin; Delaware; Erie; Franklin; Lehigh; Montgomery; Northampton; Philadelphia; Pike; Schuylkill; Susquehanna; Tioga; Union; Wyoming; and York. It was identified in 32 birds, 45 mosquito pools and a horse.

Pennsylvania's plan has three parts: public and professional education; surveillance; and, if surveillance determines there is a risk, the control of mosquitoes that carry the virus.

"This year, we're expanding our effort to detect and track mosquitoes that carry the virus," Acting Environmental Protection Secretary David E. Hess said. "We're partnering with more counties to detect and control mosquitoes, and we're giving them \$3.3 million in grants to cover the cost of equipment, supplies and training needs."

"But you and I have an important job to do this summer, too — we need to eliminate any standing water around our homes. Look around your house and neighborhood. You may not realize it, but just one small sandbox bucket filled halfway with water can produce up to 1,000 mosquitoes."

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is coordinating the mosquito-surveillance and -control portion of the multi-agency effort. DEP has been working with county West Nile coordinators to establish mosquito-monitoring sites across the Commonwealth to trap mosquitoes and sample larvae.

"I want to thank the county

West Nile coordinators, who were essential in helping us track the virus and find mosquitoes," Hess said. "With their help last year, we captured more than 500,000 mosquitoes and sent more than 2,100 samples for testing. Most important, we now have a better understanding of where mosquitoes breed and where we need to target our control efforts."

DEP and county West Nile coordinators will look for immature (larvae and pupae) and adult mosquitoes to determine if they are the species known to carry the virus, how many there are and their geographic distribution.

If these mosquitoes are detected, they will be controlled using a powdered form of naturally occurring bacteria that is harmless to humans and other aquatic life. To collect mosquitoes, DEP and county coordinators use equipment like light traps, gravid traps and dippers.

If the Department of Health's epidemiologist determines there is an outbreak or the potential

for an outbreak, a mosquito-control program would be initiated. Adult mosquitoes carrying the virus would be controlled through localized pesticide spraying. Only U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved pesticides will be used, by state Department of Agriculture-certified applicators.

The departments of Health and Agriculture will perform laboratory testing to determine the presence of the virus in the specimens from mosquitoes, birds, animals and humans.

"Similar to people, horses only become infected with West Nile virus after being bitten by an infected mosquito," Agriculture Secretary Hayes said. "We're continuing to work with veterinarians and horse owners across the state to monitor horse populations."

Secretary Zimmerman also reminded residents to report dead birds by calling 1-877-PA-HEALTH toll free, because they can be an indication that West Nile virus is present in an area.

West Nile virus previously only was 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.

The virus, when transmitted to people, can cause West Nile encephalitis, an infection that can cause an inflammation of the

brain. Anyone can get the virus, but older adults and people with compromised immune systems have the highest risk of developing severe illness because their bodies have a harder time fighting off disease.

West Nile virus cases occur primarily in the late summer or early fall, although mosquito season is usually April to October. The virus only can be spread by mosquitoes after they feed on infected birds and then bite people or animals, not by person-to-person contact.

People can take their normal summertime precautions to prevent insect bites, such as reducing outdoor exposure during peak mosquito active periods; wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants; and applying insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin.

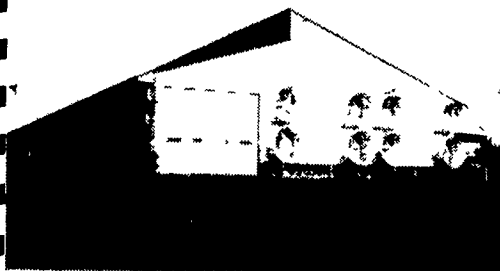
Gov. Ridge's 2001-02 budget proposes \$11.1 million to continue efforts to prevent and mitigate the potential public-health effects of West Nile virus on Pennsylvanians. The funds would provide necessary staffing and epidemiological infrastructure.

A website about West Nile virus — through the PA PowerPort at [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us) or directly at [www.WestNile.state.pa.us](http://www.WestNile.state.pa.us) — 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.

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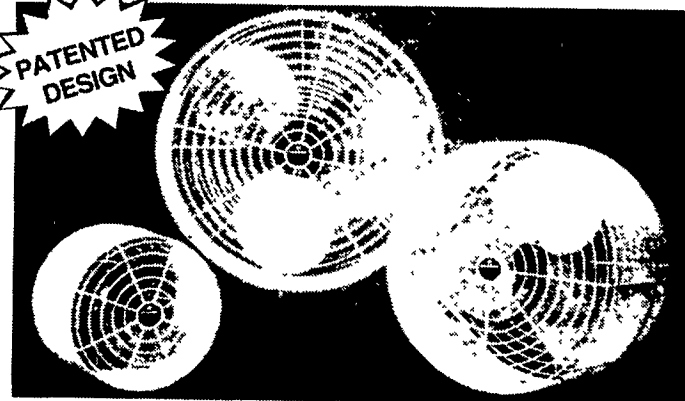
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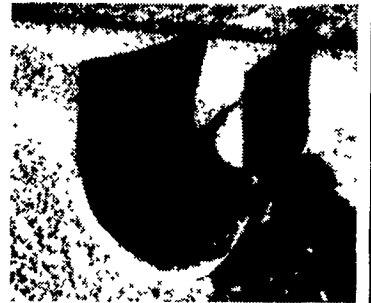
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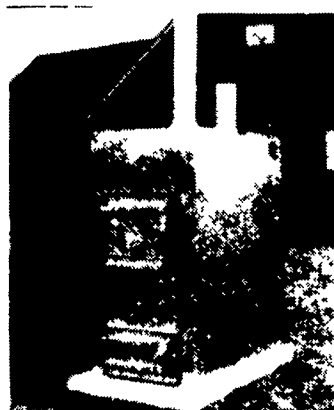
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