

COMMUNITY HEALTH

West Nile virus cases confirmed in Montcalm County

By Mark Cavitt

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Montcalm County has two confirmed cases of West Nile virus, as confirmed by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Marcus Cheatham, health officer for the Mid-Michigan Health Department, said there are usually 20 to 40 confirmed cases a year in Michigan.

“Those are the result of people who get tested. 80 percent of the people who have West Nile virus don’t even have symptoms,” said Cheatham. “We probably have a couple hundred cases a year but only hear about a few because most people don’t experience any symptoms and don’t get tested.”

In addition to the two Montcalm County cases, there was one each in Oakland and Macomb counties, bringing the total to four,

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Macomb County Health Division Director Bill Ridella

the DHHS confirmed.

Also, five Michigan blood donors have had the virus detected in their blood. In July, indications of the West

Nile virus were found in a Macomb County Health Department testing pool as well as Oakland County Health Division testing

pool.

According to the department, their illness onsets ranged from Aug. 6 through 11. All have been hospitalized with neurologic disease.

Although most people who become infected will not develop any symptoms, someone who does usually does so within three to 15 days after being bitten by a mosquito.

Symptoms include mild illness with fever, head-

ache, joint pain, vomiting diarrhea, or rash, and about one in 150 infected people will become severely ill.

Severe symptoms are associated with encephalitis or meningitis, and may include: stiff neck, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, muscle weakness, convulsions and paralysis.

People over 50 years old are more susceptible to severe symptoms.

There were 43 confirmed

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cases last year statewide, according to Macomb County Health Division Director Bill Ridella.

“I think the important message is if you’ve been bitten by a mosquito bite and experience some of the more severe symptoms you need to seek appropriate and timely medical care,” Ridella said. “It’s important to know the symptoms of being bitten by a mosquito that is carrying West Nile virus.”

Last year, three people died from West Nile virus.

So far this year statewide:

- 148 birds have tested positive for the virus from 44 of Michigan’s 83 counties;
- 86 West Nile virus positive mosquito pools have been detected in seven Michigan counties; and
- Eight horses have tested positive for West Nile virus in Clinton, Jackson, Livingston, Missaukee, Mecosta, Midland, Ottawa, and Wexford Counties.

To prevent being bitten, consider these tips:

- Maintain window and door screening to help keep mosquitoes outside;



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Mosquitos being tested for the West Nile virus at the Oakland County Health Division, 1200 N. Telegraph Road, Building 34 East, in Pontiac, in June 2017.

- Empty water from mosquito breeding sites around the home, such as buckets, unused kiddie pools, old tires or similar sites where mosquitoes lay eggs;
- Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas;

- Apply insect repellents that contain the active ingredient DEET to exposed skin or clothing, and always following the manufacturer’s directions for use; and
- Wear light colored, long-sleeved shirts and

long pants when outdoors. Apply insect repellent to clothing to help prevent bites.

Morning Sun reporter Sean Bradley contributed to this report.