Mosquitoes Aren’t Just Annoying; They Can Also Carry Disease

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We zap them and trap them. We attempt to repel them with foggers, candles, sprays, wipes, and even bracelets. We even landscape with certain flowers and plants in an attempt to keep them at bay... ahh, the king of summer pests, the dreaded mosquito!

Nothing can ruin an otherwise enjoyable outdoor activity faster than relentless, pesky mosquitoes. But did you know that when a mosquito bites, it can leave behind more than just an irritating, itchy red bump?

Mosquitoes are not just annoying, they can also be dangerous. Mosquitoes are known carriers of West Nile Virus, a disease which is contracted while feeding on infected birds, and then passed on to humans.

Symptoms of West Nile virus include high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, and a severe headache. More serious complications include neurological illness, such as meningitis (inflammation of the spinal cord and brain linings) and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). Last year, there were 43 serious illnesses and three deaths related to West Nile virus in Michigan. Nationally, there were 2,038 human cases of the virus and 94 deaths.

At this time, there is no specific treatment for West Nile virus infection, so it’s important to take precautions to avoid getting infected. One of the best ways you can protect yourself is to take extra care during peak mosquito-biting hours, which are dusk and dawn. Applying insect repellent to everyone over six months of age (following manufacturer’s directions), especially at dusk and dawn, is essential.

Additional precautions include:

*Maintaining window and door screens to help keep mosquitoes out of buildings.

*Emptying water from mosquito breeding sites such as buckets, unused kiddie pools and old tires.

*Wearing light colored, long-sleeved shirts and long pants at dusk and dawn.

As summer temperatures rise, mosquitoes and the virus develop more quickly, so it is important to be especially vigilant as the weather warms.

Additional information can be found at www.cdc.gov/westnile.