

West Nile Virus, Mosquitos and You

During the summer Massachusetts routinely tests mosquitos in local communities for the presence of West Nile Virus (WNV). The Massachusetts State Public Health Lab confirmed that a positive WNV mosquito sample was collected on August 7th in Stoneham. Melrose, Wakefield and Stoneham are all in Middlesex County. With the recent rain and the warmer weather, mosquito populations will increase and there will be more mosquitos carrying WNV, especially in August and September. Mosquitos can begin to multiply in any puddle or standing water that lasts for more than 4 days.

Most people who contract WNV do not develop any symptoms. However, about 1 in 5 infected people develop a high fever and other symptoms such as headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea or rash. The majority of people with WNV who develop a febrile illness recover completely, but fatigue and weakness can last for weeks or months. Approximately 1 in 150 people, develop a severe illness affecting the central nervous system such as meningitis or encephalitis. Of those who experience severe illness, a small number may die or develop permanent side effects. People over age 60 or those with certain medical conditions are at greater risk of developing a severe illness from WNV.

The Melrose, Wakefield and Stoneham Health and Human Services Departments are asking residents to take steps now to avoid mosquito bites. While WNV can cause serious illness, there are simple things that you can do to protect yourself and your loved ones:

- Use an insect repellent with an EPA registered ingredient like DEET or picardin. Do not use DEET on children under 2 months. Children older than 2 months should use products with DEET concentrations of 30% or less. Permethrin is very effective when applied to clothes, but should not be used directly on skin. Carefully follow instructions on the labels, especially for use with children.
- The MDPH Mosquito Repellents fact sheet can be reviewed online: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/mosquito-repellents>.
- When outdoors wear long pants, a long sleeve shirt and socks to keep mosquitos away from your skin.
- Avoid scheduling outdoor events between dusk and dawn when mosquitos are most active.
- Repair any holes in your screens and make sure they are tightly attached to doors and windows to prevent mosquitos from coming into the house.
- Remove areas of standing water around your home, e.g. regularly empty or dispose of containers that might collect water, drill holes in the bottom of recycling or other containers left outdoors so that water can drain out.
- Clean clogged roof gutters; remove leaves and debris that may prevent drainage of rainwater.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Keep swimming pools clean and properly chlorinated; remove any water collected in pool covers.
- Use landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property.