

**PRESS RELEASE**

**May 25, 2004**

**MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

**411 NORTH 5<sup>TH</sup> ST**

**SHELTON, WA 98584**

**(360) 427-9670 EXT. 747**

**TO: KMAS, KRXY, SHELTON-MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, THE OLYMPIAN, SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, THE SUN**

**RE: Protect Yourself Against West Nile Virus**

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West Nile virus is a serious, even fatal illness. It can affect people, horses and certain types of birds. It is almost always spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito. Most people who are infected with West Nile virus will not get sick. About 1 in 5 people infected will have mild symptoms such as fever, headache and body aches. About 1 in 150 people infected will have more severe symptoms including headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis and coma. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your health care provider.

Since there is no human vaccine for West Nile virus, the best way to protect yourself is to avoid mosquitoes. You can avoid mosquito bites and reduce the places where mosquitoes live and breed around your home by following a few simple steps.

To avoid mosquito bites make sure windows and doors are bug tight, repair or replace screens. Stay indoors at dawn and dusk, if possible, when mosquitoes are most active. Wear a long sleeve shirt, long pants, and a hat when going into mosquito infested areas, such as wetlands or woods. Use mosquito repellent when necessary. Always read the label and carefully follow the instructions.

Choose a mosquito repellent that offers the best protection for the amount of time you will be outdoors. If you will be outdoors for several hours, use a product that has a higher concentration of the active ingredient. When you come back indoors, wash skin that was treated with repellent with soap and water.

Don't give mosquitoes a chance. Mosquitoes need water to breed and grow. Almost anything that will hold water for one week or more can provide a breeding ground for these pests. Empty old tires, buckets, plastic covers, flowerpots and toys. Make sure roof gutters drain properly. Repair leaky faucets and sprinklers. Change the water in your birdbaths, fountains, wading pools and animal troughs at least twice a week.

West Nile virus can cause serious illness in horses and donkeys. About 1 in 3 horses that do get sick from the virus will die. To protect your horses ask your veterinarian about the West Nile virus vaccine for horses. It is rare that West Nile virus will cause illness in dogs, cats and other animals. West Nile virus infects certain wild birds.

Crows, jays, ravens, and magpies tend to become sick and die from West Nile virus infection. Increasing numbers of dead birds may be an indication of West Nile virus in the community. You can help by reporting dead crows and other birds to the Mason County Department of Health Services. Certain birds will be tested to monitor for West Nile virus. The Mason County Department of Health Services is collecting mosquitoes from around the county to be identified. Our county is home to several species of mosquito that are known to carry the West Nile virus.

For further information about West Nile virus activities in Mason County please contact Amanda Reynolds, Environmental Health Specialist at 427-9670 ext. 279 or Debbie Riley, Environmental Health Manager at 427-9670 ext. 358. To learn more about West Nile virus contact the Washington State Department of Health at 1-866-78VIRUS or [www.doh.wa.gov/wnv](http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv)

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