

● SKILLS

TAKING ACTION ABOUT WEST NILE VIRUS

Public agencies across the U.S. are responding to the threat of West Nile virus in a variety of ways ranging from aerial insecticide applications to responsible prevention programs. We've got a good challenge ahead of us to make sure that public agencies respond with prevention efforts instead of widespread use of pesticides. Now is a critical time to influence mosquito control policies and educate people in your community about how to protect themselves from West Nile virus.

This article includes detailed steps you can take to create change and affect future decisions in your area. It also provides information about public

entities and their roles in responding to West Nile virus. It is a supplement to "Meeting the Challenge of West Nile Virus Without Poisons." Please refer to this article at www.pesticide.org for important information about mosquito control, prevention, and community education.

Take action early in the season to eliminate mosquito breeding ground and reduce the risk of bites in your community. Start educating yourself, your family, your friends, and your neighborhood to do the same. Preventive measures and non-inflammatory public education are the most effective means of protection.

Community Education

Get involved in the creation and/or implementation of your community's West Nile virus response plan by con-

tacting your state or local health department to see what is being done and how you can get involved. (See "What Is Your State Planning?," page 23.) You may be able to play a role in developing community education materials.

Effective materials will be non-inflammatory, catchy, easy to understand, and in appropriate languages. They should focus on prevention, source reduction, and personal protection. This information can be distributed using posters, flyers, TV and radio ads, and regional websites. Your health department may have already developed this type of flyer or poster. (For a good example of educational materials, see Washington Department of Health's poster at www.doh.wa.gov/here/CRA/CRA_detail.asp?ID=281.)

Try organizing an educational forum or media event. Salem, Oregon, is organizing this kind of event which includes hands-on mock backyard tours, educational displays, and booths for vendors of useful products. If your community plans a similar event, make sure that it does not recommend pesticide use.

Mosquito Control

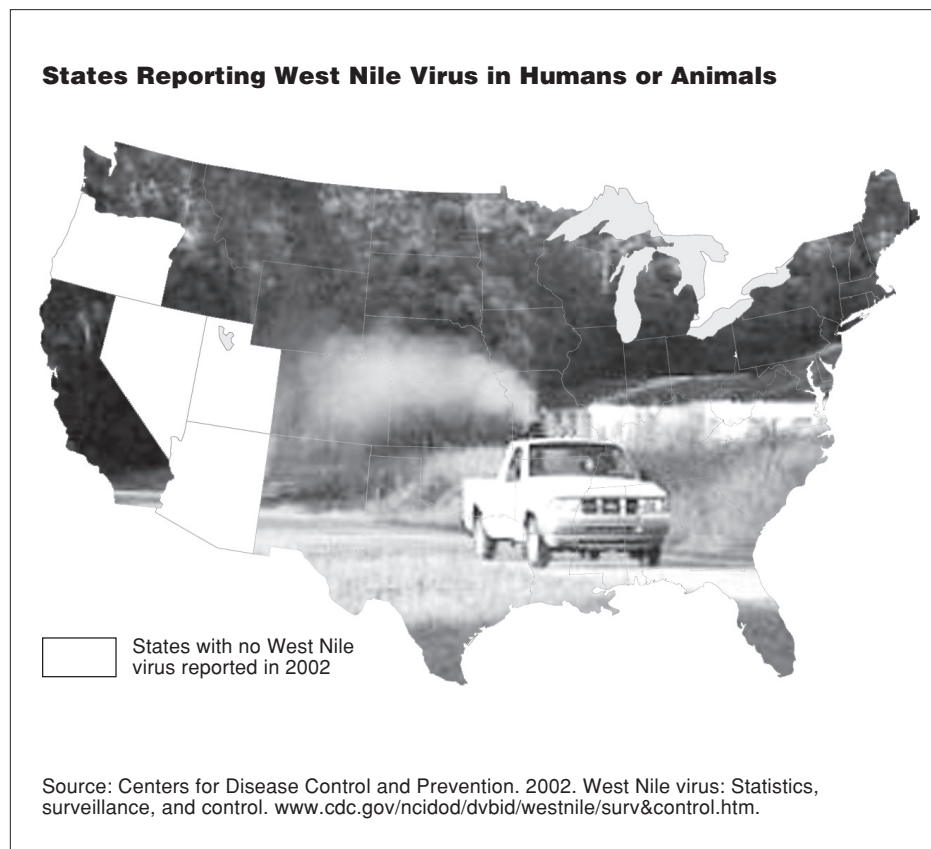
Get involved with agencies responsible for mosquito control in your area. Start by finding out if you are within a vector control district. If you are not within a vector control district you will need to find out what agency is responsible for mosquito control in your area (See "What Is Your State Planning?," page 23.)

Ask the agency responsible for mosquito control if there is a response plan for your region, and specifically if there is an aerial spray program in place.

If a plan does exist, ask for a written copy. Find out who is responsible for implementing the plan.

If a plan is not in place, ask if one is being developed and by whom and how you can contact them. Insist that

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prevention efforts and community education are priorities in the plan.

If pesticide applications are part of the mosquito control program, see "Guidelines for Mosquito Abatement Programs that Include Pesticides" in "Meeting the Challenge of West Nile Virus without Poisons," www.pesticide.org. Ask your local agency to adopt these guidelines to make the proposed applications as responsible as possible.

Neighborhood Action and Education

Don't get discouraged if your local agencies aren't responsive. You can take action in your own neighborhood to prevent the spread of West Nile virus. Contact your city to find out if you have a neighborhood association. If you do, attend a meeting to encourage your neighbors to get involved in prevention efforts.

Try organizing a work party to help recycle old tires, clean gutters, and overturn wheelbarrows and buckets in backyards or along roadsides. Many neighborhoods have annual cleanup days already scheduled and could be convinced to add a new focus to the event. You might be able to recruit a church group, school group, or local Boy or Girl Scout troop to participate. Make sure to publicize the cleanup day well with door hangers, phone calls, or door knocking.

You might also want to distribute educational flyers or posters about steps people can take to prevent mosquitos in and around their homes.

Persistence Pays

Public agencies may not be as receptive as you might hope them to be. You may be routed through several departments, sent to voice messaging systems, or given incomplete answers. Be persistent! This is a new disease to the Northwest and public agencies are sometimes understaffed and ill equipped to address your concerns.

Most importantly, remember that you have the right to be involved in the decisions that affect you, your family, your community, and the environment.

—Megan Kemple
and Anna Byers

What Is Your State Planning?

Oregon, Washington and California have all developed state mosquito borne disease plans in response to West Nile virus. They provide background information on the virus and recommendations about surveillance, education, and mosquito control. All of these plans include insecticides as an option for mosquito control; it is entirely possible that your area could experience large-scale aerial insecticide applications.

The details of the plans and the relationships between state and local agencies can be confusing. We have tried to summarize the most useful information.

Oregon

Information about West Nile virus is available at www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/acd/wnile/. The State of Oregon Mosquito-borne Disease Response Plan is available at www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/acd/wnile/response.pdf.

Under the Oregon State plan, most of the authority for spray programs and public education is granted to local mosquito and vector control districts, with local health departments assisting with public education. To find out if you are within a mosquito control district contact your county's public works department.

In areas without a vector and nuisance control district, it is up to the county or city to create a response plan. Salem and Lane County are two examples of local jurisdictions creating their own plan.

Washington

Information about West Nile Virus is available at www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/WNV.html. The Washington State Mosquito-borne Disease Response Plan is available at www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/WAArboviralRespPlan.pdf.

Local and state health departments are responsible for public education campaigns. Mosquito control districts have been established in some counties and are responsible for mosquito control. They can also help with training of local personnel.

To find out if you are within a mosquito control district contact your county's public works department.

If you aren't within a mosquito or vector control district, contact your city or county to find out who is responsible for mosquito control.

California

Information about West Nile virus is available at: <http://westnile.ca.gov/>. The California State Mosquito-borne Virus Surveillance and Response Plan is available at www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/ps/dcdc/disb/pdf/CA%20Mosquito%20Response%20Plan%2010-02.pdf.

In California, most responsibility for public education and mosquito control resides with the mosquito and vector control agencies. Local agencies handle the control of larval and adult mosquitoes and educate the public, while the state agencies maintain contracts with large-scale aerial pesticide applicators and coordinate response. To find out whether or not you are within a vector control district a useful web site is www.mosquitoes.org/directory/list.html.

Local health departments assist with public education and the state Department of Health provides oversight to areas without a vector borne disease program.

Most areas of California lie within a mosquito and vector control district. For those which are not, contact your county environmental health officer.

Montana and Idaho

Idaho's West Nile Virus information is available at http://www2.state.id.us/dhw/cdp/westnile/west_nile_index.htm.

Montana's West Nile virus information is available at http://www.dphhs.state.mt.us/news/west_nile_virus/west_nile_virus.htm.

Both of these states are in the process of creating formal state response plans to West Nile virus. Currently Montana is handling its mosquito control through mosquito control districts. Idaho does not have sufficient funds to create a statewide surveillance, education and mosquito control program. However, the Departments of Health, Agriculture, Welfare and Fish and Game are collaborating through information exchange.

To find out if you are within a mosquito control district contact your county's public works department.

Other States

Your state's response plan and educational materials may be posted on a state website. The Centers for Disease Control has a website with links to state and local government sites with information about West Nile virus at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/city_states.htm.