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Robins Added to List of Birds Being Tested for West Nile Virus

High levels of West Nile Virus activity in Northeast Illinois and a growing number of American robins testing positive for the disease have prompted the Oak Park Department of Public Health to ask residents to report dead robins, as well as crows and blue jays by calling 708.358.5694, the Village's West Nile Virus Hotline.

Birds submitted for testing should have no obvious cause of death such as being crushed in a roadway or killed by gunshot. Birds also should have been dead less than 48 hours, and not decomposed or damaged by scavenging animals.

No birds in Oak Park have tested positive for West Nile Virus to date. However, surrounding areas have reported West Nile Virus activity, including positive birds and mosquitoes.

"It is tempting to think that summer and its seasonal health risks are over once back-to-school supplies appear in stores," said Oak Park Health Director Georgeen Polyak, PhD. "But this year, as in the 2002, August is when we see a spike in virus levels in mosquitoes and illness reported in people, particularly in Cook County."

Polyak said it is now more important than ever to take steps to reduce the chances of getting bitten. She recommends wearing long sleeves and pants, using repellent with DEET, picaridin or oil of eucalyptus and staying in at dawn or dusk when mosquitoes are most active. Preventing mosquito breeding by eliminating standing water is critical, too, she said.

As human cases of West Nile Virus have continued to escalate, prevention measures, including truck-mounted ultra-low volume spraying have been stepped up in Chicago and suburban communities, including River Forest and Forest Park. Spraying is used as the last step in an overall plan to minimize the risk of West Nile virus to people.

The Des Plaines Valley Mosquito Abatement District continues to monitor levels of disease-carrying mosquitoes as well as other factors such as weather and temperature to determine whether spraying will be necessary in Oak Park.

Oak Park residents who wish to be notified if spraying becomes necessary should call 708.358.5694 and leave a message when prompted, including name, address and telephone number.

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