

West Nile Virus Season

We all know it's been a dry summer so far, and while that makes extra work for residents of Falcon and eastern El Paso County to water livestock, crops and landscape, dry weather does appear to have a benefit: fewer mosquitoes to spread West Nile virus.

Still, West Nile virus continues to be a threat in El Paso County, and the Health Department is taking action to protect you, your family and our community. You need to take preventive steps, as well.

First, let's review the basics:

West Nile virus came to El Paso County in 2002 as part of the virus' westward migration across the United States. The virus is carried long distances by infected birds and then spread locally by mosquitoes that feed on these birds. Mosquitoes breed in standing water, of course, and infected mosquitoes can then bite and pass the virus to humans and animals, such as birds and horses. The threat of contracting West Nile virus remains though mid-September.

What is the Health Department doing to protect you:

The Health Department's declining funding has impaired its ability to trap and test mosquitoes as part of what public health calls surveillance. But, we have been able to apply larvacide in areas where water is likely to collect when it does rain, including several areas around Falcon. Larvacide kills only mosquito larvae and has no effect on other wildlife. And, larvacide that is applied in dry weather becomes active when it does rain, as long as it's not washed away.

What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?:

After someone is bitten by a West Nile-infected mosquito, it can take up to two weeks for symptoms to show up. All forms of West Nile virus can be serious. Symptoms may include fever, fatigue, headache, muscle weakness, rash, stiff neck or changed mental state. You should seek medical attention from a physician promptly if you have these symptoms.

For people, we recommend the "Four D's":

DRAIN: Drain standing water where you can, and put larvacide into what you can't drain, such as stock tanks and small ponds whose waters remain still. Lakes and other bodies of water large enough to have regular wave action are less likely to harbor mosquito larvae, as are bodies of water containing small fish, which eat the larvae. But if in doubt, drain it or treat it with larvacide.

DUSK AND DAWN: Limit outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. We recognize that rural residents often are tending to livestock and other outdoor duties at those times. So it's extra important that you **DRESS** properly—that is, wear protective clothing such as long sleeves and long pants—and use a mosquito repellent with **DEET**.

Are horses still vulnerable to West Nile virus?

Yes, so if you own horses, make sure they are vaccinated. Like people, horses can become sick with West Nile virus but can't give it to anyone or anything else. Since West Nile virus can be life-threatening to horses, it's best to vaccinate them. No other livestock are thought to be affected by West Nile virus.

The Health Department continues to test dead birds to evidence of exposure to West Nile virus, particularly members of the corvid family—including crows, magpies and jays. For more information, visit our website at www.elpasocountyhealth.org.

Number of West Nile virus cases in humans, comparing years

Year	Colorado	El Paso County
2003	2,947 (63 deaths)	114 (1 death)
2007	576 (7 deaths)	4
2008	3	0

Source: The New Falcon Herald, August 16, 2008