

VIEWPOINTS

- ▶ Viewpoints are the Conservation Authority's point of view on some of the everyday environmental issues and situations people find themselves in along the Rideau.
- ▶ Visit our website @ www.rideauvalley.on.ca or contact our Landowner Resource Centre at 692-2390 for more information.
- ▶ For more information visit the Health Canada website @ www.westnilevirus.gc.ca

West Nile Viruzzzzz

The West Nile virus is an illness contracted after being bitten by a mosquito that has fed on a bird infected with the virus (mainly crows and blue jays). Many Canadians are infected with the virus; however, less than 1% of those infected got sick (fever, muscle weakness, stiff neck, confusion, severe headache, sudden sensitivity to light). Those with a weak immune system, infants, toddlers, and the elderly are most likely to be affected by the virus.

Spraying pesticides to kill mosquitoes will not solve the West Nile virus situation. Pesticides can potentially harm the environment and also eliminate natural predators of the mosquito. Moreover, mosquitoes are capable of developing a "pesticide resistance" which means stronger mosquitoes that can resist the pesticide will pass on their stronger genes to the next generation, ultimately making pesticides less effective.

Natural wetlands are breeding grounds for mosquitoes, however these balanced ecosystems are also home to many other species that are natural predators of mosquitoes such as frogs, birds and dragonflies. Research has shown that mosquito populations are held in check in healthy wetlands by natural predators that feed on mosquito larva and adults. Moreover, West Nile virus is carried primarily by *Culex pipiens* or the northern house mosquito. This species of mosquito

breeds in urban and suburban settings such as tin cans, tires and urban catch basins. Therefore, it is not necessary to spray insecticides or pesticides in wetland areas.

The best way of protecting yourself against the West Nile virus is through prevention. Mosquitoes breed in stagnant water and they remain close to their breeding ground. The most efficient way to get rid of mosquitoes is by cleaning up around your home and minimizing standing water:

- Recycle litter containers, tires, wheelbarrows, barrels or tin cans
- fill puddles, empty flower pots, drain water on pool covers or flat roofs, and change birdbaths every other day
- Clear eavestroughs of twigs and leaves throughout the summer

Reducing your activities during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active, and wearing long light color clothing when outdoors will also decrease your risk of contracting the disease.

Federally regulated insect repellent, such as those containing DEET (no greater than 30% DEET for adults and no greater than 10% DEET for children; do not apply insect repellent containing DEET on children under six months) can also be effective. Read the repellent application instructions carefully.

