



NATIONAL BIRD-FEEDING SOCIETY

Facts about the West Nile Virus

How to protect you, your family and the birds from the disease

Because water is a critical element of any backyard habitat, and the mosquitoes that transmit West Nile Virus breed in water, it is important that you know the facts about this disease.

West Nile Virus (WNV) first appeared in New York in 1999. Since then, it has spread to other states, and continues to do so. The following facts will be helpful when it reaches the area where you live.

Some people are at higher risk than others, among them the elderly and those with compromised immune systems. While it was originally thought that small children were at greater risk than adults, research has proven that this is not so; people who are at least 50 years of age and older are more likely to become infected.

No matter how small the odds of

infection, those who do become ill from the disease and don't receive medical treatment can die, so caution should prevail.

Mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water, and the larvae need 2 to 3 days to hatch. If the surface of the water is disturbed, the

of moving water, they also provide the valuable service of keeping the water surface disturbed, thereby eliminating the possibility for mosquitoes to reproduce.

Mosquitoes are a lot more likely to use other sources of water on your property than your bird baths, since one big, fat robin will do a bang-up job of disturbing the surface of the water with a bath! So take a look around your property for other areas where they can breed: gutters, buckets, wheelbarrows, toys, tires, and anything else that can hold water. Keep in mind that a mosquito can use a relatively small amount of water, such as that contained in an empty soda can, to hatch 200 to 300 every other day.

Tend to your birdbaths and continue to use the same precautions you always have — avoid being outside at dusk and dawn when they are most active, and use repellents applied to skin and clothing — along with these added ones, and you'll be able to provide water for your bird without any added concern.

Transmitting the West Nile Virus



Birds transmit virus to mosquitoes (and vice versa)



Mosquitoes transmit virus to humans. Most do not get ill.



Birds do not transmit virus to humans

WNV is a mosquito-borne virus. Infected mosquitoes transmit the virus to birds through a bite, and the birds then become carriers of the disease. Some of these birds will survive, while others will die from the infection. While crows and jays are the species that seem to have the highest mortality rates, all birds are susceptible. An infected bird can transmit the virus to an uninfected mosquito, which can then infect another bird, creating a vicious cycle of transmission.

Infected mosquitoes can, and do, transmit the virus to people, but the hysteria surrounding this fact is usually much greater than the actual risk of human infection. The vast majority of people bitten by infected mosquitoes never exhibit any symptoms and suffer no ill effects of the virus. The actual chance of a human becoming ill from WNV is less than 1%, not high odds by any standard.

mosquitoes won't hatch into mature adults. As far as bird baths being breeding grounds for mosquitoes, one simply has to do the math: replace the water in your bird bath every two days during their breeding season, and no mosquitoes will have the opportunity to reproduce.

Keeping the water in bird baths fresh and clean should be a requirement of anyone who provides water for the birds, since bacteria that can harm the birds grows in dirty water. If that alone is not reason enough for you to do so, you really shouldn't have a bird bath. The fact that water left unattended for three days can harm humans through the possibility of spreading WNV should be added incentive for everyone.

Water features like drippers, misters, and re-circulating fountains and pumps create moving water. Not only do these features attract more birds with the sound



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