



# NEWS

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## **Advice from the Montgomery County Health Department at the Start of the 2016 West Nile Virus Season**

**Norristown, PA (April 7, 2016)** – The West Nile Virus (WNV) season has begun and the Montgomery County Health Department (MCHD) is recommending that residents take precautions to clear away mosquito breeding areas around their homes. WNV, which surfaced in the U.S. in 1999, is commonly transmitted back and forth between infected birds and mosquitoes. However, humans can become the unintended hosts of the disease when they are bitten by an infected mosquito.

With the onset of warmer weather and peak WNV season approaching, MCHD is reminding residents that they can help prevent the spread of WNV and other reemerging mosquito borne diseases, such as the Zika Virus, by eliminating standing water from their property. West Nile Virus remains an unpredictable disease, and it is difficult to tell how severe a problem it will be this year. By taking steps now, residents can help to reduce mosquito populations.

MCHD also encourages residents to mosquito-proof their homes by replacing torn screens in doors and windows, cleaning out gutters, and emptying and turning over containers that could collect water allowing mosquitoes to breed. Standing water is a potential breeding ground for mosquitoes. Anything that can hold water for four days can breed thousands of mosquitoes. Eliminating standing water has proven effective in controlling WNV.

It is important to note that there are many species of mosquitoes commonly found in Montgomery County. Many of these mosquito species have different behavior patterns and feeding habits. The mosquito species (*Culex pipiens* and *Culex restuans*) commonly responsible for the spread of WNV are most active from dusk to dawn, but the mosquito species (*Aedes albopictus*) that is capable of transmitting the Zika Virus is a vigorous daytime biter. For this reason, MCHD is encouraging

residents to practice personal protective measures whenever active mosquitoes are encountered. Please refer to the below “Tips to Reduce Exposure to Mosquitoes” for recommended personal protection measures.

MCHD will soon begin routine adult mosquito surveillance and larviciding of public properties throughout the summer months. If the WNV activity poses a risk to human health, adulticiding, or spraying, may be necessary in targeted areas.

Residents who would like to be notified of when spraying will occur should sign up for ReadyMontco alerts at <http://readymontco.org>. ReadyMontco replaced the ReadyNotifyPA system in June 2015. There are no longer “health” alerts. Residents need to sign up for county alerts and municipal alerts for the jurisdiction in which they reside. Other information about WNV, including products used, can be found on the Health Department website at [www.montcopa.org/wnvinfo](http://www.montcopa.org/wnvinfo). There is also a Zika Virus page available at [www.montcopa.org/zika](http://www.montcopa.org/zika), which MCHD strongly encourages residents to visit, especially if they are planning to travel to countries where there is ongoing Zika Virus transmission.

#### Tips to Reduce Exposure to Mosquitoes:

- Check and repair windows and screens to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home.
- Eliminate any standing water that collects on your property.
- Survey your property and dispose of containers that can collect standing water such as old tires, cans, bottles, buckets, and toys.
- After it rains, empty any plant containers, bird baths, flowerpots, kiddie pools, and pool covers to keep water from collecting in these items.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly and rooftops are free of standing water.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas, and hot tubs. Keep them empty and covered if not in use. Drain water that collects in pool covers.
- Drill several holes in the bottom of recycling buckets so water can drain from them. Trash containers should be covered so no rain can accumulate in them.
- Use an approved mosquito repellent when outdoors in areas where mosquitoes are active. Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. Follow the label directions carefully. Do NOT apply to the face.
- Never allow children to apply repellents. Parents should avoid applying repellents to the hands of children.
- Check with a physician before applying repellents to very young children (less than three

years old).

- Avoid mosquito-breeding areas during peak periods of mosquito activity.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, making sure to cover feet and ankles.
- Discuss any concerns with your physician.