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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2015 West Nile Virus Season Surveillance Begins in Winnebago County

Health Department offers tips to families on protection from mosquito-borne illnesses.

Winnebago County – Summer is around the corner, and temperatures are heating up which may result in the amplification of West Nile virus in northern Illinois. Above normal temperatures can increase the rate of *Culex* mosquito production, mosquito flight activity, and virus replication, thereby increasing the proportion of mosquitoes infected with WNV and the risk of disease to humans.

Winnebago County Health officials want to remind residents that it's just a matter of time, before West Nile virus surfaces in our county. As you head out this summer, it is important to take precautions to protect yourself and your family to reduce the risk of being bitten by an infected mosquito.

The best way to prevent West Nile virus or any other mosquito-borne illness is to reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home and to take personal precautions to avoid mosquito bites. Precautions include practicing the three "R's" – reduce, repel and report.

- **REDUCE** exposure - avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are most active, especially between dusk and dawn.
 - Make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or other openings. Try to keep doors and windows shut, especially at night.
 - Eliminate all sources of standing water where mosquitoes can breed, including water in bird baths, ponds, flowerpots, wading pools, old tires and any other receptacles.
- **REPEL** - When outdoors, wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, and apply insect repellent that contains DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR 3535, according to label instructions. Consult a physician before using repellents on infants.

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- **REPORT** - Every WNV season, the Winnebago County Health Department offers a phone line for residents to report the location of recently expired birds. The report line number to call is (815)720-4245. When calling the hotline to report dead birds, please leave the address, town, ZIP code, and number of dead birds found. Beginning in 2015, residents will also be able to report dead birds by visiting the West Nile Virus Program page on the WCHD website at www.wchd.org.

The Health Department also maintains several other informational resources for the public regarding West Nile Virus. The WCHD has added a new Personal Protection Index to the WNV section of its website. This will help notify residents when conditions suggest an increased risk of WNV, and can be found at www.wchd.org. Residents can also call the WCHD's West Nile Virus Information line at (815)720-4240 to hear the most up-to-date information.

WNV is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird. West Nile virus is an infection that can cause serious illness, but most people infected with WNV have no signs or symptoms of illness. Persons at the highest risk for serious illness are those 50 years of age or older and those with weakened immune systems. Those who do show mild symptoms may have a fever, headache, body aches, skin rash or swollen lymph glands usually three to fifteen days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. If these develop into more severe symptoms, individuals should seek medical help immediately, as these may develop into encephalitis and even death.

In the summer of 2014, Winnebago County Health Department received 135 calls from the general public with questions on West Nile virus and dead bird reports. Those calls resulted in 36 birds tested, with 3 being confirmed as positive. 121 mosquito pools were collected with 3 testing positive with WNV. No confirmed human cases with West Nile virus were reported.

For more information on West Nile virus, visit the following websites:

Illinois Department of Public Health at www.idph.state.il.us

Center for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/westnile/index.html>

Winnebago County Health Department at www.wchd.org

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