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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Winnebago County Health Department Reports First Bird Positive
with West Nile Virus in Winnebago County for 2015**

The Winnebago County Health Department announces today, Wednesday, July 1, 2015, that a dead bird found in Winnebago County 61072 Zip Code (Rockton) has tested positive for West Nile Virus (WNV). This finding is much earlier from last year, when the first positive bird in Winnebago County occurred on September 2.

“We are not surprised that West Nile Virus is once again present in our County. We want to remind residents that as they head outside this summer, it’s important to take precautions to protect themselves and their family from being bitten by an infected mosquito,” states Ryan Kerch, Environmental Health Supervisor for the Winnebago County Health Department. “West Nile Virus has been confirmed to be present in Winnebago County for the 14th year in a row,” Kerch adds.

Warmer temperatures can increase the rate of *Culex* mosquito production, mosquito flight activity and virus replication, thereby increasing the proportion of birds and mosquitoes infected with WNV and the risk of disease to humans.

Based on nationwide experience in Illinois over the previous 14 years of WNV presence in the United States, the peak period for WNV transmission, particularly to humans, has been from mid-July through the middle of October.

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.
- **REPORT** - “Every WNV season, the Winnebago County Health Department offers a phone line for residents to report the location of recently expired birds” said, WNV Program Specialist, Terri Howard. The report line number to call is 815- 720-4245. After calling in a report of a dead bird, you can dispose of the bird yourself, or leave it where it lay, if not picked up for testing within 24 hours of your call,” added Terri Howard. When calling the hotline to report dead birds, please leave the address, town, Zip Code, type and number of dead birds found. Residents can also report a dead bird’s location by visiting our website at www.wchd.org and filling out the online reporting template.

“Dead birds cannot spread West Nile virus, but it is advised to avoid barehanded contact with dead birds and other animals since they carry a variety of germs. Please use a shovel, gloves or double-plastic bags to place the carcass in garbage bag or can,” added Howard. The Health Department has a West Nile virus Information line for residents to listen to the most recent information about West Nile virus for Winnebago County. That number is 815-720-4245.

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. Most people with the virus have no clinical symptoms of illness, but some may become ill three to 15 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. Those with mild symptoms may have a fever, headache, body aches, skin rash or swollen lymph glands, but those with serious symptoms such as encephalitis and meningitis should seek medical help right away as death can possibly occur. Persons at the highest risk for serious illness are those 50 years of age or older.

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 case with West Nile virus was 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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