

PRESS RELEASE

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Public Health Officials Urge Residents to Take Precautions Following West Nile Virus and first human case. [SHELBYVILLE, ILLINOIS] — [September 18, 2026]

The Shelby County Health Department is urging residents to take proactive measures against mosquito bites following the confirmation of the West Nile Virus (WNV) contributing to the death of an 86-year-old man who resides in Shelby County. The Shelby County Health Department and the Illinois Department of Public Health emphasize that prevention is the most effective defense against mosquito-borne illnesses.

West Nile Virus is primarily transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito, which contracts the virus after feeding on infected birds. While approximately 80 percent of people infected with WNV do not develop any symptoms, about 1 in 5 will experience West Nile fever, which includes symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, joint pain, vomiting, diarrhea, or a rash.

Fewer than 1 percent of infected individuals develop a severe, potentially fatal neurological illness such as encephalitis or meningitis. Individuals over the age of 60, as well as those with underlying health conditions—including cancer, diabetes, hypertension, and kidney disease—or weakened immune systems, are at a significantly higher risk for severe complications.

"Mosquito control is a shared responsibility. By eliminating standing water around our homes and using proper insect repellent, we can significantly reduce the risk of transmission."

To reduce exposure and prevent mosquito bites, health officials recommend following the "3 R's":

- **REDUCE Exposure and Breeding Grounds:** Eliminate standing water around your home where mosquitoes lay eggs. Empty, flip, or cover items that hold water at least once a week, including birdbaths, pet bowls, flowerpots, buckets, clogged gutters, and pool covers. Ensure window and door screens are in good repair to keep mosquitoes outside.
- **REPEL Mosquitoes:** When outdoors, apply an EPA-registered insect repellent containing active ingredients such as DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Always follow the label instructions, especially when applying to children. Wear protective clothing, such as loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts and long pants, when spending time outside.
- **RESTRICT Outdoor Activity:** Avoid spending prolonged periods outdoors during peak mosquito activity hours, particularly from dusk to dawn, when the species responsible for transmitting WNV are most active.

Residents who experience a sudden onset of high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, or confusion should seek medical attention immediately by contacting their physician or healthcare provider.