



BELL COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

201 North 8th Street • Temple, TX 76501
254-773-4457 • Fax 254-773-7535

www.bellcountyhealth.org

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Amy J. Yeager, MPH
District Director

Janice Smith, MD
Health Authority

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

Date: Friday, June 16, 2023

Contact: Amy J. Yeager, MPH

District Director, Bell County Public Health

Phone: 254-239-9801

Bell County Public Health Confirms First Mosquito Positive for WNV – Encourage Citizens to follow the 3 R's: Reduce, Repel, Report

Temple, Texas – Today, Bell County Public Health District announced that the first mosquito testing positive for West Nile Virus (WNV) has been identified and confirmed. A positive mosquito sample was collected at a location in North Temple on June 14, 2023, and laboratory confirmation was received today. To date, no human cases have been reported in Bell County.

Although the risk is low at this point, health officials recommend citizens be pro-active in using insect repellent to ward off mosquitoes and wear protective clothing during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.

The City of Temple has been notified of the positive mosquito sample and Bell County Public Health will continue to coordinate with the City.

West Nile Virus is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird. Investigations by health officials have found that wild birds, especially crows and blue jays, are key indicator species of West Nile Virus in an area. According to Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), most people exposed to the virus don't get sick, but about 20 percent develop symptoms like headache, fever, muscle and joint aches, nausea and fatigue. In a very small proportion, less than one percent, the virus affects the nervous system, leading to the more serious West Nile neuroinvasive disease that

can cause neck stiffness, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, paralysis and even death.

In March 2023, Bell County Public Health District was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO) to develop a Vector Surveillance Program for Bell County which includes West Nile Virus surveillance. As part of the grant, Bell County Public Health District was awarded the mentee grant to partner with the Williamson County and Cities Health District as the mentor to develop and implement this program. Bell County Public Health District was only one of two health departments/districts awarded the mentee grant award this year by NACCHO.

“Vector surveillance is an important function for public health, and we are excited to partner with Williamson County and Cities Health District. It has been a wonderful experience and a necessary addition to public health services in Bell County,” Amy J. Yeager, District Director, Bell County Public Health said.

West Nile Virus surveillance season occurs annually mid-April through mid-October. This is the prime time of the year when conditions are favorable for substantial mosquito activity. For mosquito collection, adult gravid traps are set in areas with certain conditions to collect mosquito samples for testing. Traps are moved every few days to every few weeks. Currently, traps are set in Temple and Belton with more traps arriving soon to be set throughout Bell County. Samples are collected and sent to the DSHS Austin Laboratory for testing. PCR tests are ran on each mosquito pool, as they are called, to identify if there is presence of the following viruses: West Nile Virus, Zika, Dengue, and Western Equine Virus.

“It is important that everyone knows what to do to help with the prevention and detection of West Nile Virus,” stated Amy J. Yeager, District Director at Bell County Public Health.

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 flowerpots, wading pools, old tires and any other receptacles. Change water in bird baths weekly.
- **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** - In communities where there are organized mosquito control programs, contact your municipal government to report areas of stagnant water in roadside ditches, flooded yards and similar locations that may produce mosquitoes.

“We need your help to reduce the number of mosquitoes, reduce opportunities for mosquitoes, and prevent bites. We encourage our citizens to follow these three simple steps - Reduce, Repel, and Report,” said Amy J. Yeager, District Director at Bell County Public Health.

Additional information about West Nile Virus can be found on the Texas Department of State Health Services’s Web site at <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/mosquito-borne-diseases/west-nile-virus> or the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/westnile/index.html>.

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