

Panhandle

Public Health District

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Panhandle Public Health District reminds all athletes and fans alike to stay protected from West Nile Virus

As fall sports are underway across the Panhandle, football fields, soccer complexes, and softball diamonds are once again filled with athletes, coaches, families, and fans. Many practices and games take place during the hours when mosquitoes are most active, creating an important reminder that mosquito-borne illnesses, including West Nile virus (WNV), remain a concern.

"Recent mosquito surveillance has detected West Nile virus in the Panhandle, it is more important than ever for residents to take steps to protect themselves," said Megan Barhafer, Community Health Planner with Panhandle Public Health District.

"While we are beginning to transition into fall, the risk of mosquito-borne disease remains prevalent through the first hard freeze. Mosquitoes that can carry West Nile virus are most active around dawn and dusk and are often attracted to stadium lights and grassy areas, making personal protection especially important during outdoor activities."

WNV is transmitted to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. Most people who are infected do not develop symptoms; approximately 8 in 10 people experience no symptoms at all. For those who do become ill, symptoms are typically mild and may include fever and headache. In rare cases, WNV can cause severe illness, including encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain that may result in disorientation, seizures, paralysis, or other serious neurological complications. Older adults and people with weakened immune systems are at greater risk for severe illness.

Prevention is the best to avoid getting diseases from mosquitoes. All Panhandle residents are encouraged to:

- Use insect repellent that has DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- Use extra caution at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear long sleeve shirts and pants, especially when out hiking and camping.



- Mosquitoes can breed in small pools of water, so frequently check your property for standing water and drain items such as kid wagons, bird baths, flowerpots, gutters, and tires.
- Even with the sudden change in weather, it is still advised to be cautious outdoors until there are consistently low overnight temperatures.

Dead birds are also a sign that West Nile virus is present in the area. Panhandle residents can report dead birds online during the WNV season. Visit: <https://tinyurl.com/ycudv3tc> to report birds found on your property.

If you have any questions about West Nile virus, please call Megan Barhafer, Community Health Planner, at 308-765-1939 or mbarhafer@pphd.ne.gov. Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community.