

Buzz, smack

By Sarah Sobanski

Hands up in you detest mosquitoes. Good snacks for the bats but no fun when they make you the snack - especially when the West Nile Virus has been identified in pools of mosquitoes in Belleville area, Haliburton and Peterborough. Here's what you need to know.

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health, Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health and Peterborough Public Health each discovered WNV positive mosquitoes in July. Hastings public health was the latest. It released a report on mosquitoes found with the virus for the second time July 31.

"Now that we've identified mosquitoes carrying West Nile Virus in our area, it's especially important that residents take care to prevent mosquito bites," said Wanda Tonus, Peterborough Public Health inspector, via press release. "This is a good reminder for residents to eliminate any standing water in their yards and to take personal protective measures to avoid mosquito bites." There are a number of measures that residents can take including, but not limited to, using scented oils for pest control or mosquito repellents to keep the pests at bay. Keeping the areas surrounding the home clean and clearing out stagnant water, as previously mentioned, is also very important.

As of July 22, there have been two confirmed human cases of WNV in Canada. Both were documented in Ontario, according to the Government of Canada. The number of people confirmed with the virus varies greatly from year to year. Between 2002 and 2017, the highest number of cases happened in 2007 where 2215 people were infected. In 2010 there were only five.

Haliburton public health reports the virus has come to the area earlier this year - last year it was found in mosquito pools in late August. There were 104 cases confirmed in Canada in 2016. That's 211 positive mosquito pools and 50 human cases recorded in Ontario.

"Typically West Nile Virus confirmations occur later in the summer, so this early finding confirms that we always need to be vigilant when protecting ourselves from illness caused by mosquitoes right from spring until the first heavy frost in the fall," Richard Ovcharovich, manager for environmental health with the Haliburton public health said in press release. "We have seen evidence of other mosquito-borne illnesses in our area as well in recent years so it's more important than ever to protect ourselves from the bite of mosquitoes."

Peterborough Public Health reports 20 per cent of infected people will experience mild illness with such symptoms as fever, headache, and body aches, occasionally with a skin rash and swollen lymph nodes that last several days. It suggested other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, or eye pain and that symptoms usually develop two to 14 days after receiving a bite from an infected mosquito. Less than one per cent of infected people will develop neurological symptoms.

Even if only a fifth of people infected are at risk, each health unit is warning residents to take precautions. Each health unit has also has advice on the mosquito front:

Mosquitoes are most active when the sun comes up and when it sets. Try to stay inside during these times, but if you're out and about, wear light-coloured long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Add socks and a hat - pretend it's winter - and use insect repellent containing DEET or Icaridin.

According to the Government of Canada, municipalities and provinces are in charge of controlling their mosquito populations. That means everyone should be doing their part to clean out standing water where mosquitoes lay their eggs. Keep bushes and shrubs clear of overgrowth and debris - according to Peterborough public health adult mosquitoes like to rest in dense shrubbery - and turn your compost pile often.

Something you may not have thought of: if you find a dead bird or animal it could have died due to West Nile. Don't touch them with your bare hands. Bury them and report it to your local public health unit.

On the less official side, if you have an O blood type, mosquitoes might be more attracted to you. Try blowing them off instead of squishing them. I've heard their suckers don't get dug into your limbs that way. Eating garlic might help too - they are tiny vampires.