

## West Nile Virus awakening for another season

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JACKSONTOWN -The vast majority of people who contract the West Nile virus don't know it, nor are they aware that they may be cultivating it, said a panel of experts.

"Many folks don't realize that they are contributing to the problem," said OSU Extension Agent Howard Siegrist, who was one of a four-member panel that discussed control of the deadly West Nile virus Thursday night, March 20. The panel met in the Firelight Room of Dawes Arboretum. Members agreed that the best way to control the virus is to control the mosquitoes that transmit it, mainly through eliminating sources of polluted standing water and destroying mosquito larvae where possible.

"Stagnant water is the main breeding ground," said Dawes Natural Resource Specialist Timothy Mason. Everything from birdbaths to old tires can serve as a breeding ground, as can pools of water caused by improper drainage, he said. "Go out and look at your property and try to get rid of the breeding grounds."

Once the mosquitoes start flying, it's really too late to control them, said panel member Ryan Sullivan, a retired organic chemist and a member of the Ohio Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides. Ryan, a Shaker Heights resident, was instrumental in the Cuyahoga County city's fight to control West Nile. Over 200 cases of West Nile, nearly half of all cases reported state-wide, occurred in Cuyahoga County last year.

"We made the risk for West Nile in Shaker Heights very low," he said. "We're very proud of what we accomplished"

### Larvicide most effective killer

Some of that success was gained through destroying mosquitoes while they were still in the larval stage.

"Larvicide is the best way to control mosquitoes. Pesticides are the worst," Sullivan said. Mosquitoes exist in the larval stage for about eight to 12 days early in the summer. That, he said, is the time to kill them.

Panel member Joe Ebel, Licking County Health Commissioner, said that once cases of West Nile virus are reported in people (as opposed to animals) it's time to start spraying adult mosquitoes. But, spraying every week is overkill.

"You're just wasting money," he said.

Sullivan said that larvicide can be expensive, but it won't cost more than spraying multiple applications of pesticides throughout the summer. If using a larvicide, however,

make an extra effort to let people know it's being done. Larvicide is completed quickly and quickly in remote areas, and residents will think that nothing is being done.

"Only use pesticides when absolutely necessary," he said.

Of the over 200 cases of West Nile reported in Cuyahoga County last year, Sullivan said that 19 were fatal. All of the fatalities were 80 years old or older.

"Target the elderly when you create your programs," he said.

Mason warned that "bug zappers" are useless against mosquitoes.

"They're not attracted to light," he said.

On the other hand, Sullivan said aerosol repellents like "Off" can be very effective protection.

"We're talking about disease prevention. You have to get bitten to be infected," he said. He urged repellent users to read the instructions. "These things aren't vitamins, they should be used carefully."

Sullivan said the repellents don't last long and users, especially children, should bathe before sleeping as its active ingredient can soak through skin if given enough time.

Most people who have West Nile, said Sullivan, are completely unaware, as it often has no symptoms. If four people have symptoms, it's likely that at least 60 are infected in the vicinity.

Mason made clear that mosquitoes do play an important role in nature and urged people not to think that they can or should be exterminated completely.

Ebel added that all mosquitoes could not be eradicated even if someone wanted to do so. There are simply too many of them. Extreme care must be taken when controlling the population.

"Mosquitoes have been and are a public threat," he said. "You really have to nip it in the bud. But you don't just run down the street and spray. We'll never get rid of all the mosquitoes, there's limits to what we can do. People just need to use common sense."