

MEDICAL BRIEFS

Thyroid cancer

The Thyroid Cancer Survivors 4th International Conference will take place Sept. 21-23 at the National 4-H Conference Center (near Washington, D.C.). The conference will feature 29 leading physicians, plus other specialists, from both Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Mayo Clinic, Massachusetts General Hospital, Anderson Cancer Center of Texas, Nat'l Institutes of Health, University of Chicago, Washington University Medical School, etc. The event is sponsored by ThyCa: Thyroid Cancer Survivors' Association, Inc. For registration costs, dates and other information, visit www.thyca.org, e-mail: conference@thyca.org, or write to ThyCa: Thyroid Cancer Survivors' Association, Inc., P.O. Box 1545, New York, NY 10159-1545. Call (877) 588-7904.

End-of-life workshop

University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center will host a workshop titled "Transitions: Strength for Road Ahead," a support and education workshop for adults facing end-of-life issues due to cancer, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 19 at the U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens. The workshop, sponsored by the U-M Grief and Loss Program, will include an art project, photo journaling and interactive discussions on spirituality and communication. Registration fees are \$15 per person or \$25 per couple. Lunch is included. Space is limited. To register, call (734) 615-4012 by Aug. 13.

Joint pain seminar

Oakwood Hospital & Medical Center - Dearborn will host a free seminar on joint pain from 10:30 a.m. to noon Aug. 14 at Kalman Auditorium. The seminar "Joint Pain Prevention and Relief" will be presented by Dr. Eric P. Silberg, orthopedic surgeon with the Oakwood Healthcare System. Pre-register by calling (800) 543-WELL.

Basic life support

St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia will offer a two-day Basic Life Support Training Class designed for health care providers. The course provides an opportunity to build or refine life-saving skills to aid adults, children and infants during cardiac and choking emergencies. CPR methods and the proper use of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) will be addressed. The training will be provided from 6-10 p.m. Aug. 15-16 in the hospital auditorium. \$50 per person/advance registration is required. Call (734) 655-8940.

LaLeche walk

LaLeche League of Plymouth-Canton will be joined by moms in countries across the globe during the 11th Annual World Walk for Breast-feeding. Attend a fund-raising benefit 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 11, in Pavilion South at Heritage Park in Canton. They ask that participants bring their own picnic lunches and take part in a one-mile symbolic walk through the park. Everyone is welcome. Call (734) 420-8960 or (734) 981-1381 for more information about LaLeche League of Plymouth-Canton meetings times and locations.

We want your health news

There are several ways you can reach The Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Sunday section provides numerous venues for you to offer noteworthy information including Medical Database, Reader's mailbox, event listings, Newsletters (appointments/new hires in the medical field) and Medical Briefs (medical advances, short news items from journals, press releases, etc.). We also welcome noteworthy ideas for health and fitness related stories. To submit an item to our newspaper, you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

CALL US

(734) 953-2128

WRITE US

Observer & Reader's Information, 10000 Plymouth Road, Suite 100, Plymouth, MI 48150-1000. Fax: (734) 953-2128. E-mail: health@observer.com

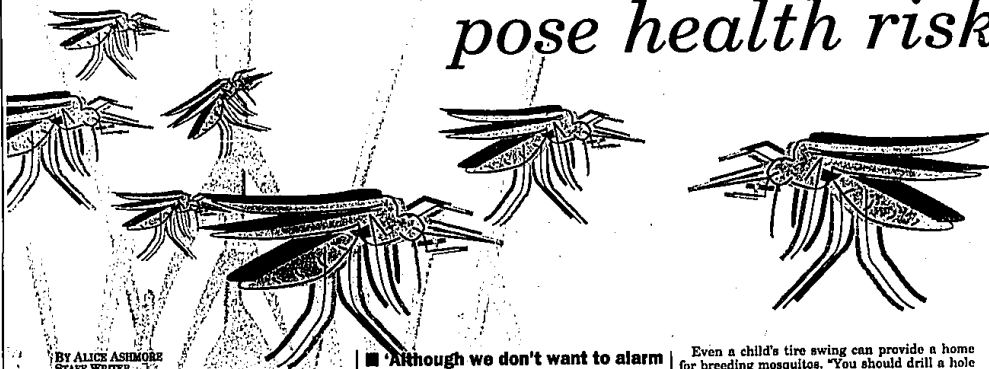
MAIL US

10000 Plymouth Road, Suite 100, Plymouth, MI 48150-1000

EMAIL US

health@observer.com

Mosquitos carrying West Nile Virus pose health risk



BY ALICE ASHMORE
STAFF WRITER
ashmore@oe.homecomm.net

A recent dry spell has reduced the local mosquito population, but Wayne County Health officials are still concerned that a dangerous and deadly disease spread by the insect could make its way into the area.

While Michigan has had no reports of the West Nile Virus, local health officials are taking precautions. "I think it is probably a matter of time before it gets here. This started on the East Coast and tends to be headed westward. We're trying to be prepared," said Steve Tackitt, director of the Environmental Division of the Wayne County Department of Public Health.

According to the United States Centers for Disease Control, as of September 2000, the West Nile virus has been documented in Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and the District of Columbia.

Birds act as hosts for the virus, and bird migration is spreading the disease, Tackitt said. "Although we don't want to alarm people, we do need a plan of action for potential problems that may occur through mosquito transmission," said Dr. Donald Lawrence, Wayne County health director.

"Late last year, nearby Essex County in the Windsor, Canada area, had a scare when a dead bird was found and testing indicated that there might be West Nile Virus in the bird. Lab results were inconclusive, but it's a matter of time before it comes this way," Lawrence said.

Watching and waiting

"Michigan is being very pro-active and prepared. We have excellent surveillance activity in place," said Sandra Collins, public health information coordinator for Wayne County. The first recognized outbreak of the West Nile virus, a mosquito-borne disease that originated in Africa in 1937, was reported in New York state in 1999, Tackitt said.

The outbreak killed seven people and sickened 62 others in New York. In 2000, 21 human cases and two deaths were reported, Tackitt said.

"Humans and animals become infected by a bite from an infected mosquito."

The West Nile virus can cause encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain) and meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord), Tackitt said.

Wayne County is now trapping mosquitoes and testing them for the virus.

"About three weeks ago, we began mosquito monitoring," Tackitt said. "We have a continuing plan of surveillance and live trapping."

The collected mosquitoes are frozen and sent to a lab under the direction of the Michigan

Department of Community Health. So far, no infected mosquitoes have been found, Tackitt said.

The county is also keeping an eye on the crow population for signs of the virus.

"The West Nile Virus seems to thrive in the crow population versus other birds," Tackitt said. "The crows act as host for the virus — the mosquito is the vector (mode of transmission)."

"If it is a fresh kill, there is an 800 number to call. An ID number and location is issued," Tackitt said.

An animal control officer is then dispatched to pick up the remains. Dead crows can be reported by calling (888) 668-0869.

"Michigan State University is doing an analysis of the crows. I believe we have sent in 10 birds and have not had any test positive," Tackitt said.

To be used for testing purposes, the bird has to have been dead less than 48 hours, Collins said.

If the bird has been dead for more than two days, it should be disposed of while wearing gloves and placed in a plastic garbage bag, she said.

The virus is not known to be spread from person to person, but there is a potential risk associated with the handling of dead animals, according to information provided by the Michigan Department of Public Health.

"Any tools used to handle the bird should be disinfected," Collins said.

Prevention

The Wayne County Department of Public Health is encouraging residents to take precautions against mosquito bites, and to prevent mosquito breeding.

"I think what is really important is prevention information," Collins said.

She encouraged people to be vigilant about standing water. "If you have outside pet bowls and bird baths, make sure you change the water every three or four days."

Collins said that clogged gutters and standing water on pool covers are also prime mosquito breeding areas.

Even a child's tire swing can provide a home for breeding mosquitoes. "You should drill a hole in the bottom of the tire to allow water to drain," she said.

Residents should also clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor hot tubs and saunas on a regular basis. If not in use they should be emptied and covered.

"We're looking for a disruption in the breeding cycle," Tackitt said.

He encouraged people to avoid mosquitoes whenever possible.

"You want to avoid standing water and marshy areas and take the proper precautions." Those measures include wearing long sleeves and long pants, whenever possible, and using an insect repellent.

The Department of Health also recommends using a repellent containing permethrin or DEET. An effective repellent will contain 35 percent DEET.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends products with a DEET content of 10 percent or lower for children. Products containing DEET should not be used on infants, according to information from the Department of Health. Repellent should be applied on exposed skin and clothing, and should be washed-off after coming indoors.

"As much as possible, stay inside when mosquito activity is heavy — dawn, dusk and early evening. Just be aware," Tackitt said.

West Nile symptoms

According to the Wayne County Department of Public Health, "Many individuals infected with the virus do not become ill, and in most individuals infections are mild."

The incubation for the virus is usually three to 12 days.

"The people we are most concerned about are people over 50, and those with compromised immune systems. They have the highest risk of severe disease," Collins said.

Milder symptoms of the West Nile Virus are: Slight fever, headache, rash, body aches and swollen glands.

Severe symptoms may include a high fever, stiff neck, confusion, coma, tremors, muscle weakness, paralysis and death.

"In more severe cases, intensive supportive therapy is needed," she said.

So far, residents of Wayne County seem to be taking the possibility of the West Nile Virus in stride.

"We've had some people call, but we stress there is no reason to panic," Collins said.



New warnings for hormone therapy patients with heart disease

The American Heart Association recently advised physicians against prescribing hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for the sole purpose of preventing heart attacks and strokes in women who already have cardiovascular disease, according to recommendations published in the most recent edition of *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

The new position is based on recent scientific studies about the role of HRT in reducing the risk of coronary heart disease in postmenopausal women.

For postmenopausal women who have had a heart attack or stroke, the guidelines recommend that HRT not be initiated for secondary prevention. This recommendation is based, in part, on the results of the Heart and Estrogen Replacement Study (HERS), a large-scale study found that no benefit of HRT was seen among women with heart disease.

For preventing a first heart attack or stroke, the association recommends reducing risk factors, such as high cholesterol and blood pressure, through lifestyle modifications and if needed, with medications to improve cholesterol profiles and lower elevated blood pressure. Pending the results

of ongoing studies, the guidelines recommend that the decision on HRT use be based primarily on on-heart related benefits and risks.

For those women with diagnosed cardiovascular disease, who are undergoing long term hormone replacement therapy, the decision to continue or stop HRT should be based on established noncardiovascular benefits and risks, as well as patient preference.

Clarify position

Because the data on HRT has been unclear, many physicians have asked the American Heart Association to clarify its position on HRT says Lori Mosca, M.D., Ph.D., lead author of the American Heart Association's Science Advisory, titled, "Hormone Replacement Therapy and Cardiovascular Disease." She is director of preventive cardiology at New York Presbyterian Hospital of Columbia and Cornell universities.

"For many years, cardiologists and other health care providers who take care of women have assumed that HRT protects the heart," said Mosca. "At this time there is no sufficient evidence to make that claim — our purpose is to clarify the

NEW RESEARCH STUDY

role of hormones in heart disease prevention."

The statement concludes that for healthy women there is neither a compelling reason to initiate HRT for the sole purpose of primary coronary heart disease prevention, nor a compelling reason to discontinue it if she is doing well with therapy.

For now, women and their physicians should shift their attention to lifestyle changes such as smoking cessation, weight loss and physical activity that are known to reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases (CVD). Also, treatments like cholesterol-lowering drugs and blood pressure medication are proven to protect against CVD and are underutilized in women.

Cardiovascular diseases, which include heart attack and stroke, are the leading causes of death in women. After menopause, CVD risk rises sharply.

"For more than 50 million American women over

Please see DISEASE, D5