

West Nile Virus Program Suspended

McKean County's comprehensive West Nile Virus Program came to a halt on September 1, 2009 as DEP suspended grant funding to 36 counties with active spraying and outreach initiatives. Although McKean County has participated in the PA West Nile virus program since its inception in 2001, it is not one of the 31 counties slated to continue receiving state funds due to significant cuts in the PA state budget signed on October 9, 2009.

The McKean County Conservation District took over the local program, coordinated by Watershed Specialist Heather McKean, in 2007. As stated by McKean, "It is unfortunate that we have had to end the mosquito surveillance and control program early this year. Although we have historically not seen high levels of West Nile virus in the county, the threat still exists and may increase without routine control of mosquito populations." As of now, the District has received no indication as to if or when West Nile Virus Program grant funding to McKean County will be resumed.

DEP has stated that it will provide very limited monitoring in the counties facing cuts if they have been historically associated with West Nile Virus transmission. If mosquitoes are found carrying the virus in these areas, the Department will take all necessary measures to reduce the mosquito population through larval or adult mosquito control. The virus has been detected in 24 PA counties with the first confirmed human case for 2009 reported in Luzerne County.

Without active spraying programs in place, local residents have been encouraged to eliminate standing water, stock ornamental ponds with larvae-consuming fish, and use appropriate repellants during mosquito season, which has finally come to an end for this year, but will return as soon as the first balmy days of Spring return in 2010.