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U.S. Department of the Interior

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## Fire Island National Seashore News Release

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### **Mosquitoes in the Ecosystem—Programs Offered August 24 & 25 Learn About Fire Island’s Mosquito Management Program; Practice Preventive Measures to Avoid Mosquito Bites and Risk of Exposure to West Nile Virus**

*Patchogue, NY*—Parts of Fire Island National Seashore have experienced an abundance of mosquitoes this summer. As the air and water temperatures rise, so does mosquito development and the possible risk of transmission of West Nile virus (WNV) from infected mosquitoes. One indicator of the presence of WNV is finding dead birds—notably crows, jays, robins and raptors—which may have succumbed to the virus. The National Park Service conducts a monitoring program to sample mosquitoes for evidence of WNV. By mid- August 2007, no evidence of WNV- infected mosquitoes or birds had been detected within Fire Island National Seashore.

Although West Nile virus has not been detected on Fire Island, six mosquito samples have tested positive on Long Island at Blydenburgh County Park ([July 31](#), [July 26](#), and [July 17](#)), Nesconset ([July 31](#)), Greenlawn ([August 7](#)), and Heckscher State Park ([August 7](#)). A robin collected on [July 25](#) at Kings Park tested positive for WNV. Most of these locations are at least 10 miles north of the Fire Island, but late summer is the time to be most vigilant in avoiding exposure to infected mosquitoes. You should know how protect yourself from biting mosquitoes.

We invite you to learn more about Fire Island National Seashore’s mosquito monitoring program and the valuable role mosquitoes play in the ecosystem. Park biologists Fernando Villalba and Jordan Raphael will present a free program on [Friday, August 24 at 7:30 pm](#) in the park’s Wilderness Visitor Center, and on [Saturday, August 25 at 7:30 pm](#) at Watch Hill. “We hope you’ll gain a better appreciation for these insects, as you discover how to avoid them,” stated Villalba.

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West Nile virus (WNV) is spread by various mosquito species which have had a blood meal on an infected bird. After an incubation period (roughly 10 days), infected mosquitoes can transmit West Nile virus to humans and/or other animals. Disease symptoms do not develop in everyone who is bitten by an infected mosquito. The elderly and people who are fighting illnesses are more at risk to develop WNV symptoms and possibly encephalitis. A person who contracts WNV is apparently not contagious to other humans. The disease first appeared in this country in the New York City area in 1999, and has spread across the nation rapidly. There were 177 WNV-related fatalities across the country in 2006, four of them in New York State. In Suffolk County, two people were diagnosed with West Nile disease in 2006, while seven human cases were reported in the county in 2005.

Suffolk County Department of Health provides a **Dead Bird Hotline** at 631- 853- 8405 to report any suspicious dead or dying birds.

The National Park Service works closely with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Suffolk County Department of Health Service, Suffolk County Vector Control, and local Fire Island and Long Island municipalities to determine the best course of action to protect residents, visitors and employees of the Seashore. When threats to human health (such as the presence of West Nile virus) occur, actions to protect the public may include control methods such as applying larvicide or spraying. The public is notified 24 hours in advance of any spray event. Information on the date and exact location of any spraying can be found on the Suffolk County web site at [www.co.suffolk.ny.us/vector](http://www.co.suffolk.ny.us/vector) or by calling 631- 852- 4939. Links to Fire Island National Seashore's Mosquito Action Plan and the park's current Mosquito Surveillance and Management Protocol is available on the web at [www.nps.gov/fiis/planyourvisit/avoid-mosquitoes.htm](http://www.nps.gov/fiis/planyourvisit/avoid-mosquitoes.htm).

Further information about Fire Island National Seashore may be obtained at [www.nps.gov/fiis](http://www.nps.gov/fiis) or by calling 631- 289- 4810.

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Mosquito bites can be itchy and annoying, but generally only a very small fraction of mosquitoes will carry and transmit any disease. The use of pesticides to manage mosquitoes as a nuisance organism exposes sensitive plants and animals, as well as people, to unnecessary levels of harmful chemicals and may even be ineffective in reducing the potential for disease transmission and circulation. Under certain conditions the presence of viruses, such as West Nile, within the mosquito population can increase and present a risk to human health. In such cases, the application of pesticides in an appropriate manner may be necessary.

### **What You Can Do To Avoid Mosquitoes**

- Check your surroundings for sources of stagnant water (gutters, birdbaths, septic systems, buckets and open containers, tarps, puddles) that provide breeding habitat for freshwater mosquitoes. Empty standing water.
- Time your outdoor activities to avoid each species' particular feeding time. Use extra protection if you are out at dawn or dusk.
- Safely apply appropriate insect repellents (28-30% DEET or citronella). Special precautions must be taken when using any [insect repellent on children](#).
- Wear hat, long sleeves, long pants and socks or net "bug out" suits when in mosquito habitat.