

AUGUST 8, 2003

**SCHAKOWSKY: COMMONSENSE
AGAINST WEST NILE VIRUS**

CHICAGO, IL - Following an announcement by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the increased number of West Nile Virus infections this year, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) said that local, state and federal authorities can provide the people of Illinois with critical information to protect themselves against the virus.

The City of Chicago:

http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?In_url=http://www.ci.chi.il.us/Health/WestNileVirus/

The State of Illinois:

http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?In_url=http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/wnv.htm

Phone 217-782-4977

TTY 800-547-0466

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?In_url=http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm

English: (888) 246-2675

Español: (888) 246-2857

TTY: (866) 874 2646

Below is today's Chicago Tribune story entitled "*West Nile cases higher so far than last year.*"

By Karen Mellen

Tribune staff reporter

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As the mosquito-borne West Nile virus continues moving west across the country, it has infected more people this summer than were stricken at this time last year, leaving federal officials wary that this outbreak could rival or surpass last year's epidemic.

"Bottom line is, it's here; it's happening in a lot of jurisdictions," Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, said in a teleconference Thursday.

"Every sign indicates it is on the increase. Now is the time for people to step up their efforts to fight the bite."

Illinois, which led the nation in numbers of cases and fatalities last year, so far has not reported any human or horse illnesses, health officials said. By this time last year, the state had reported one human case, a young woman who contracted West Nile fever and recovered, and several equine cases.

But there have been a number of infected mosquito pools and dead birds reported, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health.

Nationally, 153 people in 16 states had tested positive for the virus as of Thursday, compared with 112 cases at this time last year, according to the CDC.

So far, four people have died-- two in Texas, one in Colorado, and one in Alabama. Last year 284 people died nationwide from West Nile.

In Colorado, a wet spring followed by a hot July, with temperatures over 90 degrees for many days, may have accounted for an abundance of mosquitoes and the spread of the virus, said Cindy Parmenter of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Illinois health officials have said similar weather patterns last summer may have contributed to the state's outbreak, which killed more than 60 people and sickened more than 800.

The Culex mosquito, the best-known transmitter of West Nile, breeds more in hot weather.

Illinois health officials said more communities doing mosquito control and a rather cool summer may be contributing to lower numbers of positive mosquito batches and birds, compared with this time in 2002.

"But who's to say that's not still coming?" asked Tammy Leonard, spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Public Health. "We just entered August. If we have several days in the upper 90s, [the mosquitoes] may become more active."

Gerberding said the larger number of cases and the lower median age for patients may be due to greater public awareness and more testing.

So far, the median age for patients is 45, compared with 55 last year, CDC officials said.

What concerns officials is that the virus is showing up in significant numbers in states that did not have a major outbreak last year, such as Colorado, and in states with large numbers of human cases in 2002.

For instance, Ohio, which had the highest per-capita rate of West Nile infection in the country last year, has reported seven human cases so far, and Louisiana, which also had a large outbreak last summer, has reported 15 cases.

Gerberding said the same challenges face health officials this year as last: to promote mosquito control efforts by state and local governments and to educate the public.